Social inclusion research
Shortened Burundi case

Every Voice Counts
1. Introduction

This qualitative study on social inclusion of women and girls in (in)formal planning and budgeting processes at local level took place under the EVC programme. In Burundi, EVC advocates for the respect of the 30% quota of women’s participation at community level, it aims for inclusion of women and girls in community development planning (PCDC), and advocates for the completion and implementation of the Gender Based Violence (GBV) law; specifically looking at the quality of legal and health services offered to GBV victims and strengthening municipal marriage registration. Key strategies of EVC Burundi include the implementation of the Community Scorecard (CSC), support to Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), and advocacy on the aforementioned topics. Lobby is tied to CSC outcomes as well as existing community peace clubs.

There is very little data available on how women and girls participate in (in)formal governance spaces that focus on planning and budgeting, and how they perceive their participation. This research therefore aims respond to the following main research question: What are the factors or “pathways” that contribute to women and girls participating in (in)formal planning and budgeting processes? In line with the overall research framework of this study, specific emphasis lies on analysing different degrees of participation, notably access, presence and influence. Factors/pathways are tied to three types of empowerment (or obstacles): individual or collective agency of women, their relations with others (ex. family, community, organisations), and support offered by structures (ex. authorities and CSOs/INGOs). Findings aim to improve effectiveness of the EVC programme by offering insight into how the programme can influence these (in) formal planning and budgeting processes.

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Cover photo: VSLA members in Gitega, Burundi in July 2019. Photo by Ninon Ndayikengurukiye.
2. Background to the Burundi context

2.1 Fragility, conflict and women’s rights

After having gained independence from Belgian rule in 1962, Burundi’s monarchy was transformed into a republic in 1966. Its post-independence history is one of on-going ethnic conflict between the Hutu majority (85%) and the Tutsi and Batwa minorities (respectively 14 and 1% of the population), preventing the country from rising from poverty.¹

Progress on gender is rooted in the 2005 constitution that enacts international instruments promoting gender equality (ex. CEDAW). Burundi also adopted a gender policy (most recent for 2012-2025) and a UNSCR 1325 action plan (2012-2016). The revised penal code (2009/2013) and GBV law (2016) criminalises sexual and gender-based violence, including marital rape. The inheritance law is under revision since 2004, in particular to grant succession rights to women, but still awaits enactment by Parliament. Since 2009 a 30% women quota applies to communal councils, the Parliament, the Senate and political party lists, either by suffrage or co-opting.² Municipalities led by women often score high in the annual communal performance evaluations done by the Ministry of Decentralisation.³

Yet, women’s voices and priorities are underrepresented in current peace dialogue. The crisis deepens fragility and increases the likelihood of new cycles of violent conflict⁴. This will heighten vulnerabilities of women and throw-back progress made on women’s rights.⁵ Patriarchal norms expect that women obey their husband, conduct domestic work, and make them susceptible to domestic violence (47%)⁶ and spousal sexual abuse. Patronage politics make that women in higher decision-making positions do not automatically push for women’s rights⁷ or represent the voice and needs of rural women.

² Co-opting allows for ex-post adjustments to fulfill gender and ethnic quotas stipulated in the electoral code.
⁴ Following the 2015 elections, 41 out of 119 administrators are women (34%). The 2017 performance evaluation shows that out of the top 20 highest scoring communes, 9 have a female administrator. Derived after further analysis from CENI https://www.ceniburundi.bi/IMG/pdf/decret100-17_administrateurs_elus_2015.pdf and http://burundi-agnews.org/decentralisation/burundi-évaluation-de-la-performance-des-communes-2017/.
⁵ Oxfam (2018) Space to be heard: Mobilizing the power of people to reshape civic space. Oxford: Oxfam GB.
⁷ Prevalence of domestic violence against women (lifetime), 2019 OECD gender index for Burundi.
⁸ Browne, E (2014) Elected women’s effectiveness at representing women’s interests. GSDRC.
2.2 Spaces of (in)formal planning and budgeting

Under the decentralised administration (2005) only communes\(^8\) have the authority over five-year local planning and budgeting: the Communal Community Development Planning Process (PCDC).\(^9\) Currently third generation PCDCs (2019-2023) are under development, for which gender guidance has been provided for the first time. As a formal space the PCDC was object of this study, alongside hybrid spaces such as the monthly colline meetings, water and health committees, and the Mixed Security Committee (CMS) that brings together security actors, municipal authorities and civil society to prevent and respond to security incidents. Finally, two informal EVC spaces were included: the Community Score Card (CSC) for joint assessment and lobby on legal and health GBV services and marriage registration (EVC focus in Burundi) and Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) that stimulate women to launch (small) economic enterprises.

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\(^8\) Burundi’s administrative levels are: Province, Commune, Zone, Colline.

\(^9\) The PCDC is reflected in the Burundian constitution (art. 267, 2005) and law 1-016 of 20/04/2005 on communal organization. The first generation of PCDC covered 2009-2013, followed by a second generation PCDC 2014-2018. The PCDC process aligns with three important national policies: Vision Burundi 2025, the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and the Burundi priorities of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The process involves preparations, participatory diagnostics, thematic discussion and reflections, action planning and budgeting.
3. Findings

3.1 Women’s participation in (in)formal planning and budgeting

*Increased participation but confined to specific spaces*

Respondents say that women’s participation in local governance structures has gradually increased, except for youth/girls as they lack social status: “you have to be married: no household, no say”. Women mostly participate in informal associative spaces that are linked to the domain of women such as VSLA, peace clubs and health committees. Women and men are somewhat equally present in colline meetings given physical proximity. Female chef de colline are still rare (6.3%) as the 30% women quota does not apply on colline level. Economically independent women are preferred for such positions, “as they are less prone to corruption”. Some examples of increased participation of women in PCDC committees were noted. Also gender expertise in the planning teams is improving, and a gender review of PCDC annual evaluation criteria is currently done by CARE.

*Objectives that women have for their participation*

Women participate in (in)formal planning and budgeting spaces out of individual or local interests. VSLA participants aim to raise the economic position of their family or become economically independent: “A woman should not always be supported by her husband, she also has eyes, ears, hands and feet”. Through colline meetings women aim to assist victims of family conflict, domestic violence and other forms of GBV. Others seek information about what happens at colline level, or out of curiosity. Making friends and ‘belonging’ was also mentioned. Finally, some women said to participate in formal spaces to prove their ability, to “combat fear and shame to speak out” and to challenge male majority and authority. A few added that this would help them to prepare their candidacy for the 2020 elections or to improve the governance of the country.

Women mostly influence on ‘women’s issues’

Within associations and VSLA women influence other women to adhere, manage savings/loans, and address problems within the group. VSLA members all report household economic changes. For example, a poor widow is now member of 11 VSLA and manages to financially contribute to all of them. Also, many women autonomously created other VSLA. In all locations visited the number of active VSLA had increased over the past few years. Influence in semi-formal spaces (ex. colline meetings) is mostly exercised by female council members and active local women leaders. They particularly exercise influence on locally relevant ‘women themes’, such as education, health, drinking water, and socio-economic issues. In particular conflict resolution and SGBV were often referenced as a topic of influence (over 50% of 34 reported changes).

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11 Members are either council members, or professional staff of different sectors. In Vumbi their number raised to 7 from 2, among 20; and in the four communes of Kirunda, Bukirasazi, Gitega and Giteranyi, on average 42% of the members is woman. 190515 KII state authority, Vumbi; 190517 KII CSO, Bujumbura.

12 The Ministry of Communal Development evaluates all communes on an annual basis (April-July) and publishes results.

13 A study by Care Canada also shows VSLA increase household resilience to absorb shocks. Guy, I and Yakeu, S.E (2017) Promoting opportunities for women’s economic empowerment in rural Africa. Agriteam Canada consulting.
3.2 Where women and girls still lag behind

**Influence over topics that are considered to be the domain of men**

Men have greatest presence in formal governance structures, such as political parties, colline councils, communal councils and the CMS because they have “the responsibility to inform, guide and serve the local community”. Men mostly influence politics, security and land, all topics over which women have no control. Regarding land, this is mostly caused by the fact that Burundi legislation offers no succession rights for women. Security related matters are perceived to be too risky, physically hard, or too complex for women. Women’s weak influence over politics is explained by the fact that women leave it to the men because they prefer more ‘simple topics’. Interestingly, this viewpoint was uniquely shared by male respondents. Also, it was mentioned that the Imbonerakure (male youth of the ruling party) increasingly intervene in GBV/conflict cases, sidetracking women’s influence.

**The link between local level participation and influence over policy**

Concrete examples of women influencing PCDC content or more general policy were not given. Women said to lack information about the PCDC process or related meetings. Also, as women are underrepresented in formal decision-making structures (ex. conseil colline, conseil communal, political parties) and sectoral functions that are predominantly involved in the PCDC process there is a disconnect between how local needs and priorities inform higher level planning and budgeting. Also, communal administration is generally felt to be remote from everyday life.\(^{14}\)

3.3 Drivers of participation

**VSLA as an important stepping-stone for broader participation**

Women join VSLAs because they see the economic benefits in other women or are sensitized by CARE and local authorities. Within VSLA women are informed about other types of community meetings and benefit from capacity support on lobbying, leadership, human rights and gender and GBV. Other women structures and CSOs/INGOs also offer such support (ex. Dushirahamwe, CDFC, World Vision). This raises women’s self-esteem for public participation and VSLA income allows women to buy basic necessities for public participation, such as soap and cloths. “You cannot show up wearing an old dress or wearing the same dress twice”. VSLA membership is hence a stepping stone towards participation in other structures. “Joining a VSLA offered me the chance to be elected as council member, as the network of VSLA women appreciated me a lot”.

**Role models are inspirational**

Local women that lead by example are a role model to others. For example, women who joined multiple VSLA and saw their income significantly grow receive a lot of respect from the community. Respondents also specifically referenced female chef de colline as being ‘courageous’, ‘decisive’ and ‘appreciated’. “As our colline is directed by a woman, the other women are eloquent and have the desire to express their ideas”. Because of patriarchal scrutiny women leaders also feel they are obliged to be a role model, avoiding mishaps. Although role models beyond the colline level are also inspirational, such as female Administrators\(^{15}\) or communal council members, their connection with local women is weaker. No specific evidence was found on peer support offered by female role models.

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\(^{15}\) Two out of the three EVC communes studied are led by a female Administrator, and the third male Administrator is known to be gender-progressive.
Marital approval and support
Except for widows, all women interviewed that participate in a given space asked for marital approval. Data shows that most successful women have a supportive husband, like this man: “I have hopes that her participation in the VSLA opens up doors. As she gets used to sharing her opinion, maybe she will be elected into the colline council one day”. And a father about his daughter: “I can see that the VSLA prepares her for a bright future. She is now interested in the colline meetings and also expresses herself well, she even gives advise if I quarrel with my wife”.

National legislation on 30% women quota and the role of local authorities
What furthermore contributes to women’s participation is the national legislation on the 30% women quota. All authorities and local leaders interviewed say they align with it, although many respondents feel it is ‘practice by obligation’. “If it wasn’t for the law no women would be part of decision-making structures in our community”. The main reason for this is that supporting women participation conflicts with a male interest to hold onto positions.

3.4 Barriers for the inclusion of women and girls in local governance processes
Socio-cultural perceptions and norms
Socio-cultural perceptions and norms are still the main obstacle to women participation. Women that are absent from associations/VSLA are usually obstructed by their husbands who fear their wife overpowers them, will neglect household tasks, or becomes unfaithful; all elements conducive for conflict, divorce, and mocking by the community. These fears were only expressed in KIs and FGDs held with men/male authorities. Women themselves hold beliefs of inferiority and have low self-esteem. Others say they do not participate because they lack the means (for VSLA integration) or have no time because of household activities and agricultural work.

Timing and location of meetings
Another obstacle pertains to the timing of formal meetings. Colline meetings are mostly held in the morning when women are still occupied with domestic or agricultural work. Transport and child care limitations are a barrier for women to attend higher level commune level meetings. A previous project by Twitezimbere supported community kindergartens, whereby women organised care for neighbouring children. This raised the participation of women in events further away from home.

Election and nomination processes
As mentioned, participation in VSLA and colline meetings are a stepping stone for being elected into formal decision-making structures such as the colline council or sectoral government structures (ex. CCDC, Forum des Femmes). Female candidates have however limited means for campaigning (or ‘propaganda’ as locally called) and face male competition who buy votes (pots de vin). Hence, the number of female candidates is generally much higher than those elected. Nomination of women in the CMS is low as security is seen as a men’s issue. But also, CMS members are chosen from other leadership positions, in which women are underrepresented.
4. Conclusion

At colline level an increased number of women is active in associative structures, and especially in VSLA. This gives them access to a network, public speaking skills, confidence, planning and budgeting tools and an income that helps to cover essentials for participation (ex. clothing). VSLA form a stepping stone towards participation in colline meetings, from where some women are elected into the colline councils and nominated into committees tied with the PCDC process. Participation on colline level is however not necessarily opening up space for women to access to decision-making spaces at higher administrative level. Influence by women is mostly restricted to local-level ‘women’s issues’ (GBV and conflict resolution in particular). Influence over male domains such as security, land, politics is weak, including over PCDC.

A few factors especially enable women to participate: access to information about structures and meetings, the ability to follow role models (individual agency), a supportive husband, access to capital (VSLA), and positive community consideration. Also, national legislation on the 30% quota has been very influential in pushing authorities to promote and respect women involvement, although more a gender transformative mentality change among authorities is still needed. CSO support on economic opportunities and leadership skills also shows to be important.

The main obstacles for women’s greater inclusion are of practical nature (ex. timing of meetings, lack of means), challenges faced in election processes, the increasingly politicisation of decision-making structures, and persisting patriarchal social norms in society. Collaboration/coalition between CSOs and the central government should be sought to further address obstacles that women face in the process of access, participation and influence planning and budgeting processes. Alternative intervention strategies that take a local and household-focused approach are recommended, as social norms are strongest felt here yet these ‘spaces’ are still least politicized.