

*By Elizabeth Tanganyika;*

Good governance embraced by the RPF-Inkotanyi led government is one of the pillars of leadership critical in empowering women to move from a marginal place to which traditional Rwandan society and previous regimes had confined them.

Taking cognizance of the increasing number of women in high profile offices, efforts by all players to make Rwandans appreciate equality of men and women have paid off, 28 years later.

After the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, the government embarked on reconstruction and rebuilding the country from social and economic ruins – efforts which included return to the rule of law and respect to the human rights of all Rwandans, a departure from the sectarianism and divisionism that reigned in the genocidal regimes.

President Paul Kagame has been at the forefront of women's emancipation and he's on record stressing that the right to equality is not given.

"Gender equality in every sector is not a favor, it is your right. It is the way it should be. The right to equality is not something that can be given or taken. It begins with each of you believing in your equal ability to achieve" President Paul Kagame said on the 5th of July 2013 when meeting three thousand women from across the country

The commitment to respect all Rwandans regardless of their differences is entrenched in Article 16 of the 2003 Constitution, amended in 2015.

"Protection from discrimination All Rwandans are born and remain equal in rights and freedoms. Discrimination of any kind or its propaganda based on, inter alia, ethnic origin, family or ancestry, clan, skin colour or race, sex, region, economic categories, religion or faith, opinion, fortune, cultural differences, language, economic status, physical or mental disability or any other form of discrimination are prohibited and punishable by law" says Article 16.

There are several affirmative policies aiming at increasing women's participation in public affairs, and it's a constitution requirement to have at least 30% of women at all levels of leadership.

Government's programmes that include mass sensitization about women have led

to women's realization of the importance equality of men and women as well as their worth in development. With self-esteem and confidence women's engagement in all spheres of life including politics and economics has been on the rise in Rwanda.

Today, women's representation in legislature is 61.3% much higher than it was in 2003 and 2018 at 48.8% and 56% respectively. Yet, women outnumber men on the Cabinet constituting 55% of the Cabinet seats as of 2022. In 1990, women representation in the Rwanda Parliament stood at 18%.



Nonetheless, women's increased participation in politics is infectious and women's engagement in other sectors such as entrepreneurship, trade, tourism, medicine, engineering, sports et cetera that were previously regarded exclusively men's fields, is on the upward trend.

There is concrete evidence on the ground indicating that women's achievements to a considerable extent match the massive emancipation efforts by the Rwandan

government, and women are outperforming men in some fields including men's football, hence, demystifying a myriad of African myths and cultures that present women as a weak sex.

Salima Mukansanga is one of African women who have inspired millions of African girls. The 33-year old Mukansanga made history when she became the first woman to referee an Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON 2021) match since the Continental tournament was midwived back in 1957.

It's no longer news for Rwandan women to serve the international community in sensitive office.

Early this year, the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres nominated Rwandan diplomat Valentine Rugwabiza to head United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) that was established in April 2014 to mainly protect civilians in the conflict-plagued African nation.

Rugwabiza has served in various ranks as Minister for East African Community, the Chief Executive Officer of the Rwanda Development Board, the Deputy Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and envoy to Switzerland among others.

By and large, women have achieved as a result of an interplay of numerous factors other than luck and favour. The success story of women's emancipation in Rwanda, however, would be incomplete without highlighting the political will of the government.