



GENDER ROLES AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RWANDA, WITH A COMPARATIVE FOCUS ON NYAMASHEKE AND RUSIZI DISTRICTS

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Abstract:

This study examines the relationship between gender roles and socioeconomic development in Rwanda, with a comparative focus on Nyamasheke and Rusizi districts. Despite Rwanda's notable progress in promoting gender equality through progressive policies and institutional frameworks, significant disparities persist between rural and urban contexts. These disparities continue to shape access to resources, participation in economic activities, and decision-making power among men and women. The study therefore seeks to analyze how socially and culturally constructed gender roles influence development outcomes in these two contrasting settings. A mixed-methods research design was adopted, integrating quantitative data from household surveys with qualitative insights obtained through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving community members, local leaders, and development practitioners. The findings indicate that traditional gender norms remain more deeply

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entrenched in rural areas such as Nyamasheke, where women face constraints in accessing education, land ownership, and financial services. In contrast, urban areas like Rusizi exhibit relatively higher levels of gender inclusion, with increased opportunities for women's employment and participation in decision-making processes, although structural inequalities still persist. The study further identifies key challenges, including unequal division of labor, limited access to credit and productive resources for women, and enduring cultural attitudes that reinforce gender disparities. However, emerging opportunities such as government-led gender mainstreaming policies, community-based development programs, and improved access to education offer promising pathways toward more inclusive growth. The study concludes that achieving equitable socioeconomic development in Rwanda requires context-specific, gender-responsive strategies that address both structural and cultural barriers across rural and urban settings. Additionally, sustained stakeholder engagement is of paramount importance.

Keywords: gender roles, socioeconomic development, gender inequality, gender empowerment

1. Introduction

Gender equality and inclusive socioeconomic development are central priorities of Rwanda's national development agenda and its global commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015). Since the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda has implemented deliberate policy interventions to promote gender equality, most notably through constitutional gender quotas institutionalized in the 2003 Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda. These reforms have resulted in unprecedented levels of women's political representation, with women consistently holding a majority of seats in Parliament. Consequently, Rwanda is widely recognized as a global leader in gender inclusion in governance (Burnet, 2011; Powley, 2005; World Economic Forum, 2023). Nevertheless, persistent cultural norms and structural constraints continue to shape everyday gender roles, particularly in rural and peri-urban contexts.

Despite notable progress in political representation, gender disparities remain pronounced in economic participation and time use. National gender statistics indicate that women's labour force participation has stagnated or declined slightly in recent years, while women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda [NISR], 2020, 2022). These patterns reflect deeply embedded gendered divisions of labour that influence access to income, assets, and decision-making power. Furthermore, agriculture remains the primary livelihood for a substantial proportion of Rwandan households, particularly in rural areas, and women constitute the majority of agricultural workers (NISR, 2018; Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2021). Despite their central role in agricultural production, women's contributions remain undervalued and constrained by limited access to land, credit, and extension services.

A growing body of research has examined the relationship between gender norms and women's socioeconomic empowerment in Rwanda. Empirical evidence demonstrates that traditional gender attitudes, unequal household labour divisions, and restrictive community norms continue to limit women's economic opportunities, even in the context of progressive national gender policies (Mukabalisa, 2015). Qualitative studies on women's economic empowerment initiatives further reveal that household power relations and entrenched gender norms can either facilitate or undermine women's participation in development programs, particularly in rural settings (Abbott & Malunda, 2016; Newbury & Baldwin, 2013). Other studies highlight ambivalent societal attitudes toward women's employment, showing that factors such as education, age, and exposure to media significantly influence whether individuals endorse traditional or more egalitarian gender roles (Bitekerezo et al., 2019; World Bank, 2020).

While existing literature offers valuable insights into gendered constraints and empowerment strategies at national and district levels, there remains a notable gap in comparative analyses that explicitly examine rural-urban differences in gender roles within a single analytical framework. Many studies focus predominantly on rural districts or rely on national-level datasets that obscure localized variations. Addressing this gap is critical for understanding how gender norms, economic participation, and policy impacts are experienced differently across diverse social and spatial contexts.

The existing literature demonstrates that Rwanda's gender equality achievements are real and significant, especially in political representation and legal protections. However, there is consensus across studies that normative, structural, and economic barriers continue to limit the translation of gender policy into tangible socioeconomic outcomes for women and men (MIGEPROF, n.d.; NISR, 2024; Mukabalisa, 2025; Mumporeze, 2025).

Most studies to date focus on either national-level data or isolated rural contexts. What is missing is a comparative analysis of rural and urban areas within the same study framework, which can reveal how context, including access to resources, community norms, and labour market structure, differently shapes gender roles and socioeconomic participation. This study's focus on Nyamasheke and Rusizi Districts addresses this gap by comparing and contrasting gender roles across diverse environments, thereby providing richer insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars aiming to enhance gender-responsive development strategies.

This paper is derived from a Master's dissertation entitled "An Analysis of Gender Roles in Socioeconomic Development in Rwandan Rural and Urban Areas: Challenges and Perspectives: Nyamasheke and Rusizi Districts as a Case Study."

Using a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative household survey data with qualitative insights from local authorities and community members, the study contributes to scholarly debates and informs gender-responsive policies aimed at promoting inclusive and sustainable development in Rwanda.

The specific objectives of the study are: To analyze the influence of gender roles on socioeconomic development in Nyamasheke and Rusizi Districts; To compare rural

and urban differences in the impact of gender roles on socioeconomic participation and development outcomes; To identify and propose strategies for addressing the challenges faced by men and women in order to enhance gender-inclusive socioeconomic development in Rwanda.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Influence of Gender Roles on Socioeconomic Development

Gender roles significantly shape patterns of socioeconomic development by influencing access to education, employment, and decision-making power. According to Talcott Parsons (1955), traditional societies assign instrumental roles to men and expressive roles to women, reinforcing economic and social divisions that structure labor and authority. However, feminist scholars such as Judith Butler (1990) argue that gender roles are socially constructed rather than biologically determined, meaning they can be transformed to promote equality. Earlier feminist economists, including Ester Boserup (1970), empirically demonstrated that women's limited access to land, credit, and agricultural inputs reduces productivity and slows economic growth in developing countries. Expanding this perspective, Naila Kabeer (1999) conceptualizes empowerment as the expansion of individuals' ability to make strategic life choices, emphasizing that gender inequality restricts women's agency and economic participation. Similarly, Amartya Sen (1999) argues that development should be understood as the expansion of freedoms, including gender equality, since restricting women's opportunities constrains national progress and human capability formation. Empirical global evidence from the World Bank (2012; 2022) indicates that gender gaps in labor markets, education, and entrepreneurship reduce overall GDP growth and perpetuate intergenerational poverty cycles. The International Labour Organization (2018) further reports that occupational segregation and wage disparities continue to limit women's earnings and economic security worldwide. Moreover, Raewyn Connell (2005) highlights how dominant forms of masculinity also shape economic structures, often pressuring men into risky or unstable forms of employment while reinforcing unequal power hierarchies. Collectively, these theoretical and empirical contributions demonstrate that rigid gender roles not only marginalize women but also structure economic systems in ways that limit inclusive growth. Therefore, transforming restrictive gender norms is essential for achieving equitable, inclusive, and sustainable socioeconomic development.

2.2 The Differential Impact of Gender Roles on Socioeconomic Participation and Development Outcomes

Gender roles shape both socioeconomic participation and development outcomes, but their impacts differ and vary between rural and urban areas. Goldin (2021) shows that in urban areas, women often face barriers in high-skill jobs and leadership positions due to professional norms, whereas in rural areas, women's labor is frequently confined to unpaid domestic work and subsistence farming. Altuzarra, Gálvez-Gálvez, and

González-Flores (2021) demonstrate that gender inequality in education and labor markets slows economic growth more markedly in rural areas, where fewer schooling and employment opportunities exist for women, compared to urban areas with greater access to schools and formal jobs. Grown and Buvinic (2025) argue that persistent gender gaps in entrepreneurship and wages limit poverty reduction and inclusive growth, but the effects are especially pronounced in rural communities where women have less access to credit, markets, and networks than in urban centers. Benería (2016) highlights that gendered labor divisions in formal and informal economies differ: urban women are more engaged in service and industrial sectors, while rural women are concentrated in agriculture and informal domestic labor, reinforcing structural development disparities between rural and urban areas.

2.3 The Challenges Faced by Men and Women in Contributing to Socioeconomic Development

Globally, rigid gender roles continue to shape socioeconomic outcomes by constraining opportunities for both women and men. According to UN Women (2023), women's economic participation remains significantly lower than men's worldwide, largely due to unequal access to resources and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (2018) reports a persistent global gender wage gap of approximately 20%, with women overrepresented in informal and vulnerable employment. At the continental level in Africa, early work by Ester Boserup (1970) demonstrated that women's limited access to land and agricultural inputs reduced overall productivity, a pattern still evident in many African economies today. More recent continental analyses by the African Development Bank (2015) confirm that gender inequality in access to finance and property rights significantly constrains economic growth across African states. In Rwanda in particular, despite remarkable political progress in gender representation, economic disparities persist: the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (2024) reports that women's labor force participation remains lower than men's and that women spend substantially more time on unpaid domestic work. Furthermore, research by Nadine Mumporeze (2020) highlights that traditional gender norms continue to influence attitudes toward women's employment and men's caregiving roles. Together, these global (2018–2023), continental (1970–2015), and national (2020–2024) studies demonstrate that deeply embedded gender roles continue to limit equitable contributions to socioeconomic development.

2.4 Strategies for Enhancing Gender-Inclusive Socioeconomic Development in Rural and Urban Areas

Gender roles play a central role in shaping socioeconomic development in Rwanda by influencing who has access to education, employment, and decision-making opportunities. Despite Rwanda's remarkable achievements in political gender representation, significant economic and social disparities persist. Globally, gender norms limit women's labor market participation and perpetuate wage gaps, as

highlighted by UN Women (2023), while the International Labour Organization (2018) reports that occupational segregation and unequal pay reduce women's economic security and overall productivity. In Africa, scholars such as Ester Boserup (1970) have shown that unequal access to productive resources—particularly land, credit, and agricultural inputs—constrains women's contributions to rural economies, a pattern that continues to affect many African countries, including Rwanda (African Development Bank, 2015).

In Rwanda, women's labor force participation remains lower than men's, particularly in rural areas where subsistence farming dominates, and women often lack equal control over land and agricultural resources (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2024). Additionally, women spend significantly more time on unpaid domestic and caregiving work than men, reducing their availability for income-generating activities and skill development. Scholars such as Nadine Mumporeze (2020) note that traditional gender norms continue to influence household roles, limiting women's economic agency and discouraging men from participating fully in caregiving. These structural and cultural barriers hinder the equitable distribution of economic opportunities and slow national development.

To enhance gender-inclusive socioeconomic development, several strategies can be implemented. First, expanding access to quality education and skills development is essential. Universal secondary education, technical and vocational training (TVET), and targeted programs in STEM for girls can help bridge knowledge and skills gaps in both rural and urban areas (World Bank, 2022). Second, strengthening women's access to productive resources including land, credit, digital financial services, and cooperative support is crucial for increasing productivity, particularly in rural farming communities (Boserup, 1970; FAO, 2019). Third, reducing the unpaid care burden through community-based childcare, equitable parental leave, and campaigns promoting male involvement in domestic work can free women's time for economic activities (International Labour Organization, 2018).

Additionally, promoting gender-responsive employment policies is necessary. This includes enforcing equal pay, formalizing informal work where women are overrepresented, and ensuring safe and inclusive workplaces in both rural and urban contexts (UN Women, 2023). Strengthening political and institutional participation at local levels—through gender mainstreaming in district planning, leadership training for women in cooperatives, and gender budgeting—can ensure that development policies are responsive to women's and men's needs. Transforming harmful gender norms through education, community engagement, and media campaigns is also critical, as emphasized by Judith Butler (1990), who argues that gender roles are socially constructed and can therefore be changed.

Finally, bridging the digital divide is a vital strategy for Rwanda's gender-inclusive development. Expanding digital hubs, providing ICT training for women and girls, and supporting women-led tech startups can create new economic opportunities in urban and rural settings. Monitoring progress through gender-disaggregated data

collection and evaluation ensures that interventions are evidence-based and impactful (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2024; World Bank, 2022). Collectively, these strategies integrate education, economic empowerment, social norm transformation, and institutional accountability to enable both women and men to contribute fully to Rwanda's socioeconomic development, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable growth trajectory.

3. Methodology

This study applied a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, which helped to fill the gaps resulting from either method (Jokonya, 2016). The aim to explore gender roles in socioeconomic development in rural and urban areas of Rwanda, with a focus on Ruharambuga (Nyamasheke District) and Kamembe (Rusizi District). This approach allowed for triangulation of findings and ensured a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

3.1 Quantitative Data Collection

The household questionnaire was employed to collect quantitative data from residents in both Ruharambuga (rural) and Kamembe (urban) sectors. This tool allowed respondents to select responses from predetermined options, ensuring consistency and ease of data analysis. To determine the households to be surveyed, a systematic random sampling technique was applied, whereby households were selected at regular intervals from a complete list of households in each village. The sample size for the study was calculated using Kothari's (2004, p. 179) formula for finite populations, which provides a reliable method for determining the number of respondents required to obtain statistically valid results. The formula is expressed as follows:

The sample size was determined using Kothari's (2004, p. 179) formula for finite populations:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = desired sample size,

N = total population size (number of households in the study area),

e = margin of error (level of precision, usually 0.05 for 95% confidence level).

For this study, the total number of households (N) was 7,301, taken purposively, and the margin of error (e) was set at 0.05. Substituting these values into the formula yielded a sample size of 365 households, which were proportionally distributed between Ruharambuga and Kamembe sectors. Systematic random sampling was then applied within each village to select households at regular intervals from a complete list, ensuring that every household had an equal chance of being included in the study.

With n representing the sample size, $z = 1.96$ corresponding to the standard normal value for a 95% confidence level, $p = 0.5$ representing the estimated probability of success, and $q = 0.5$ representing the probability of failure ($q = 1 - p$), and $e = 0.05$ as the margin of error, the sample size was calculated using the formula for finite populations (Kothari, 2004). Substituting these values into the formula yielded a sample size of 365 households from a total population (N) of 7,301 households across the two sectors.

The sample was proportionally allocated based on the population of each sector, with larger sectors receiving a correspondingly larger number of respondents. To select households, three cells were randomly chosen in each sector. With assistance from the Cell Executive Secretary, village coordinators ("Imidugudu") provided lists of households within each selected cell.

3.2 Qualitative Data Collection

In addition to the household questionnaire, qualitative data collection methods were employed to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, experiences, and explanations regarding the study topic. Qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions conducted with selected community leaders, local authorities, and residents in both Ruharambuga (rural) and Kamembe (urban) sectors.

Participants for the qualitative component were selected using purposive sampling, based on their knowledge, experience, and relevance to the research objectives. The interviews and discussions were guided by semi-structured interview guides, allowing flexibility for probing and follow-up questions. This approach enabled the researcher to capture rich, descriptive information that could not be obtained through structured questionnaires alone.

The qualitative data complemented the quantitative findings by providing explanations, contextual insights, and deeper interpretation of statistical results, thereby enhancing the validity and comprehensiveness of the study.

4. Study's Population

The study was conducted in Nyamasheke District and Rusizi District, specifically in Ruharambuga Sector (rural) and Kamembe Sector (urban). In Nyamasheke District, Ruharambuga Sector comprised the cells of Ntendezi, Save, and Kanazi. Within Ntendezi Cell, the villages of Nganzo, Muko, Gasharu, and Karambi accounted for a total of 525 households, from which 72 households were sampled. Save Cell included the villages of Bigutu, Kanyovu, Nyamuhunga, and Munini, with 410 households and a sample of 46 households. Kanazi Cell consisted of Rwamahwa, Rusambu, Ryamashuri, and Karambo villages, totaling 414 households, from which 72 households were selected. Overall, Ruharambuga Sector had 1,349 households, and 190 households were included in the sample.

In Rusizi District, the study focused on Kamembe Sector, covering the cells of Kamashangi, Gihundwe, and Cyangugu. Kamashangi Cell comprised the villages of Mahoro, Rushakamba, Muganda, and Nyakayonga, with a total of 497 households, of which 82 households were sampled. Gihundwe Cell included Nkurunziza, Batero, Kabeza, and Murambi villages, representing 369 households, with 45 households selected for the study. Cyangugu Cell consisted of the villages of Kacyangugu, Ntwari, Mundima, and Gatovu, totaling 609 households, from which 48 households were sampled. In total, Kamembe Sector had 1,475 households, and 175 households were selected for participation in the study.

5. Findings

5.1 Characteristics of Respondents

This section gives a picture of the respondents' age group, their sex, level of education, and their marital status.

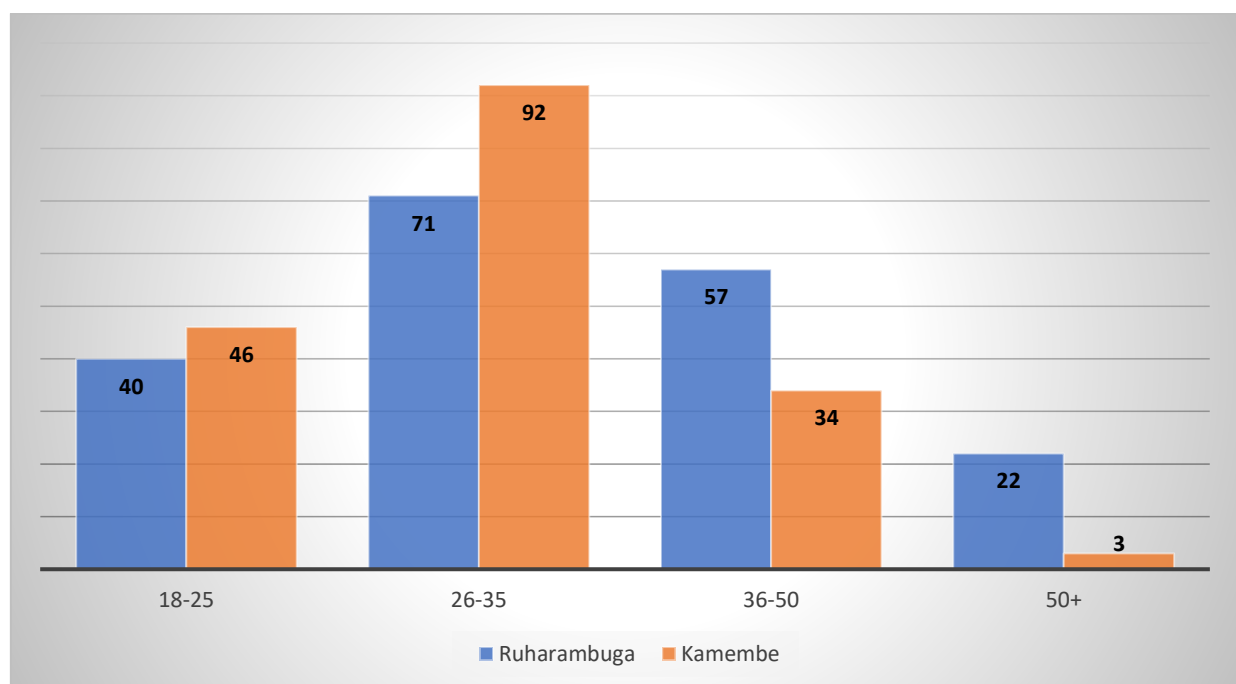


Figure 1: Age of Respondents

The respondents are mostly young and middle-aged adults. Across both sites, the largest age group is 26–35 years (163 respondents, 44.7%), followed by 36–50 years (91 respondents, 24.9%) and 18–25 years (86 respondents, 23.6%). Only a small proportion are 50 years and older (25 respondents, 6.8%). Ruharambuga has a higher share of older respondents (36–50 and 50+) compared to Kamembe, while Kamembe has more respondents in the 26–35 age group. Overall, the findings largely reflect the perspectives of adults in their prime working and family-raising years, which may influence their engagement with gender policy initiatives.

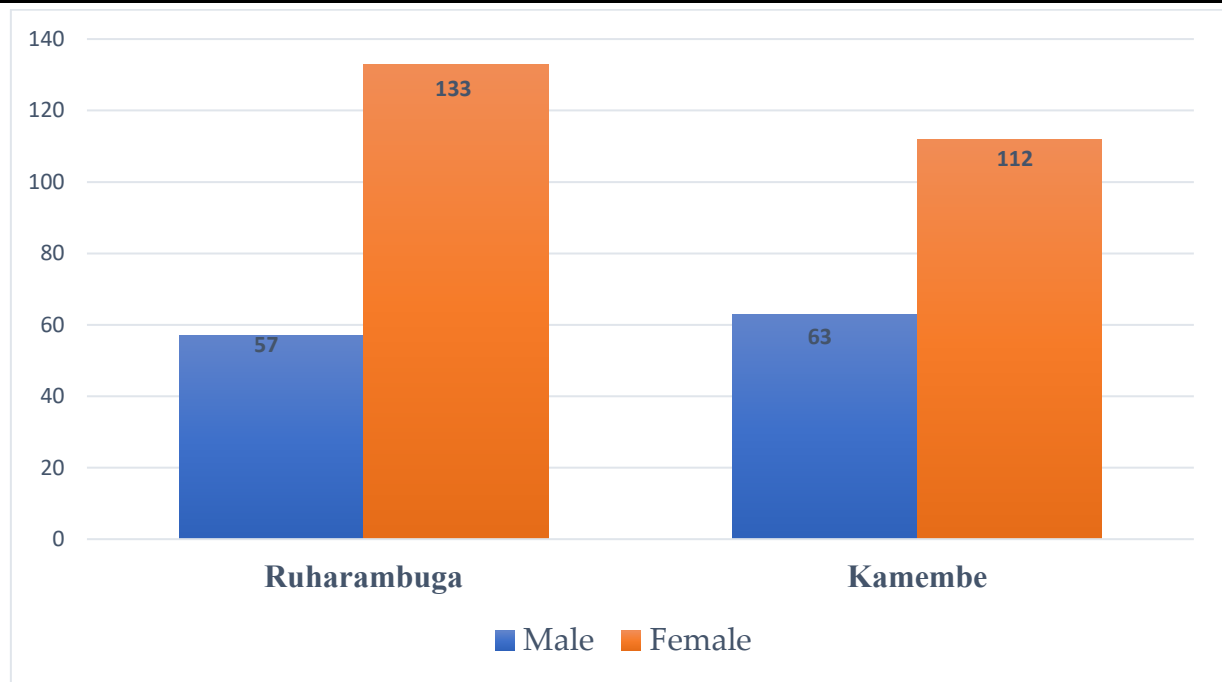


Figure 2: Sex of Respondents

The respondent sample is predominantly female, with 245 out of 365 participants (67.1%). In Ruharambuga, females make up about 70% of respondents, while in Kamembe, they constitute around 64%. This female majority suggests that the study's findings largely reflect women's perspectives, which is particularly relevant for understanding attitudes toward gender policy, participation, and empowerment initiatives.

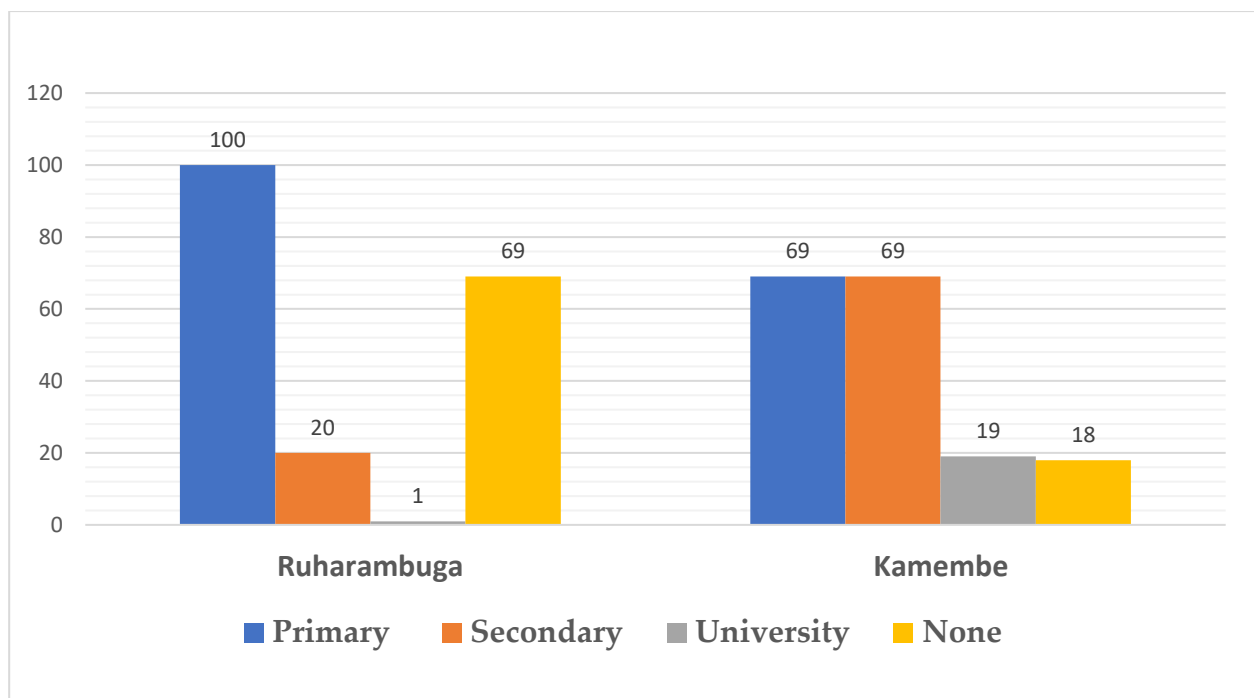


Figure 3: Respondents' Level of Education

The educational profile of the 365 respondents shows significant disparities in the extent of educational attainment between Ruharambuga and Kamembe. Overall, primary education is the most common level, and a substantial number of respondents (87) have no formal education, indicating a considerable extent of educational disadvantage in the study population. In Ruharambuga, the extent of formal education is generally low: most respondents have primary education (100) or no education (69), with very few reaching secondary (20) or university levels (1). In contrast, Kamembe exhibits a greater and more diverse extent of education, with many respondents attaining secondary (69) and university education (19), and only a small number lacking formal schooling (18). These differences in educational extent suggest that respondents' ability to access, understand, and engage with gender policy initiatives likely varies between the two areas, with higher education in Kamembe supporting greater awareness and informed participation.

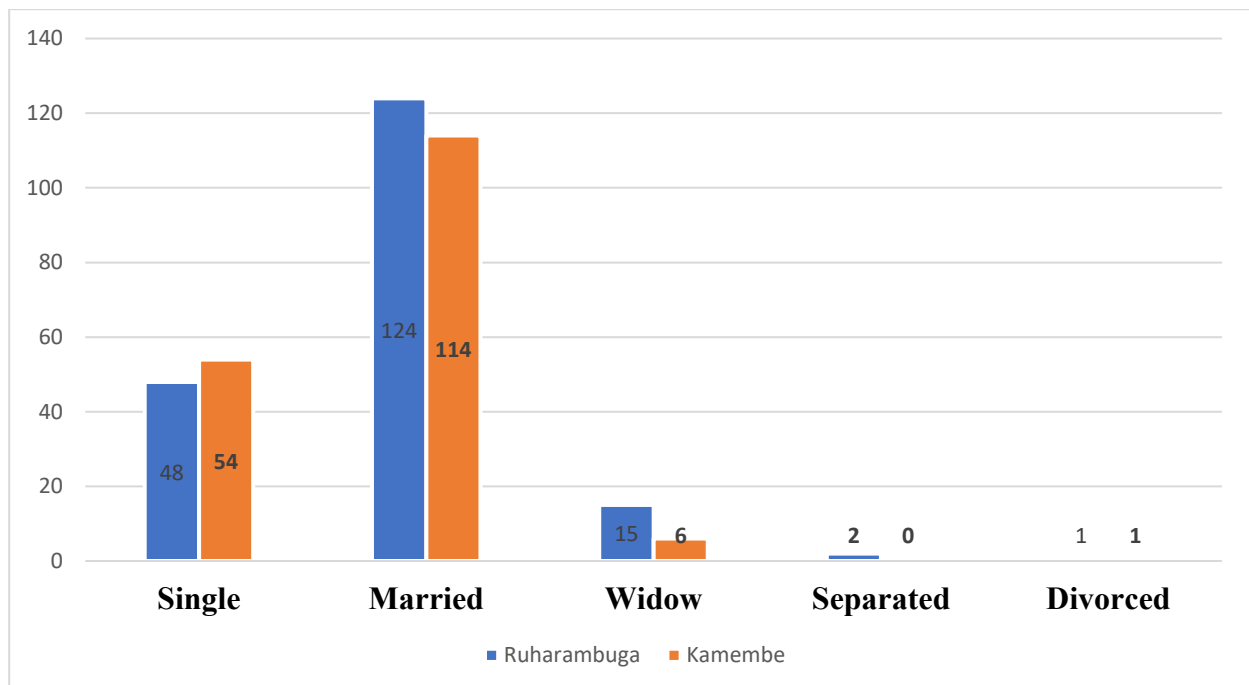


Figure 4: Marital Status of Respondents

The marital status data of 365 respondents from Ruharambuga and Kamembe show that the majority are married (238 respondents), making marriage the dominant status in both areas. Single respondents form the second-largest group (102), with slightly more singles in Kamembe than in Ruharambuga. Widowed respondents represent a small proportion of the sample (21), while separated and divorced individuals are very few (4 in total). Overall, the respondent population is predominantly married, indicating that the findings largely reflect the views of individuals with family and household responsibilities, which may influence perceptions of gender roles and gender policy.

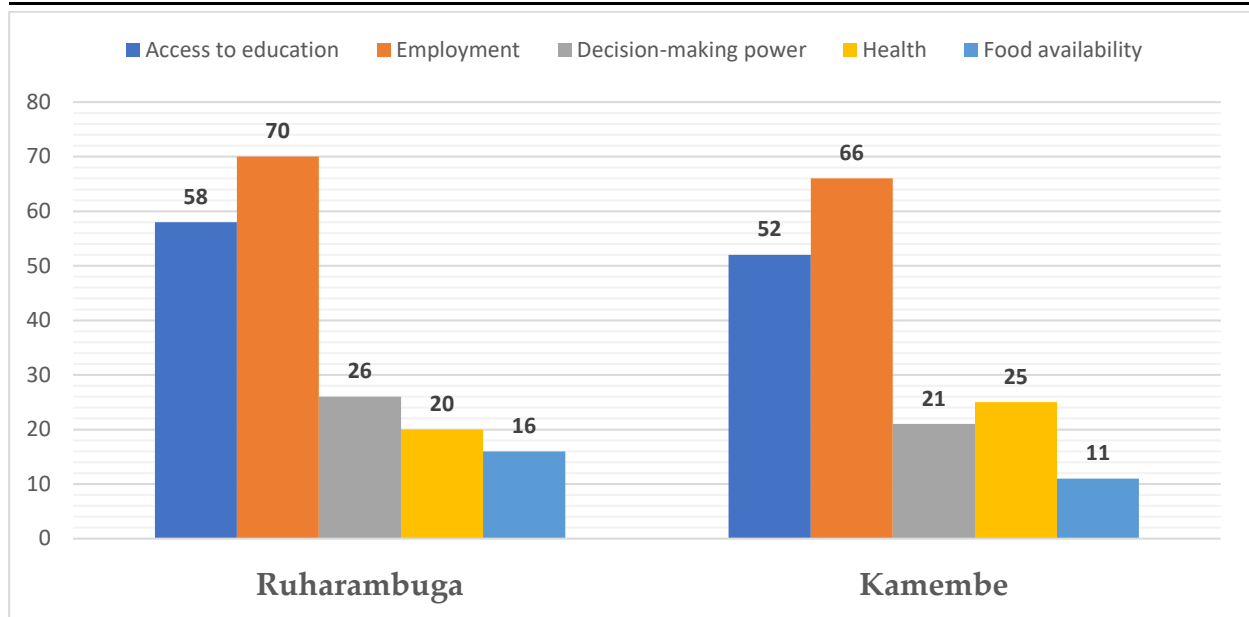


Figure 5: Respondents' views on the Influence of Gender Roles on Socioeconomic Development in Ruharambuga and Kamembe Sector

Figure 5 shows that employment is the key factor influencing gender roles on socioeconomic development in Ruharambuga and Kamembe as reported by 70 respondents from Ruharambuga and 66 respondents from Kamembe. The results also indicate that access to education is another factor influencing gender roles on socioeconomic development, as reported by 58 respondents from Ruharambuga and 52 respondents from Kamembe and decision- making power, as reported by 26 respondents from Ruharambuga and 21 respondents from Kamembe.

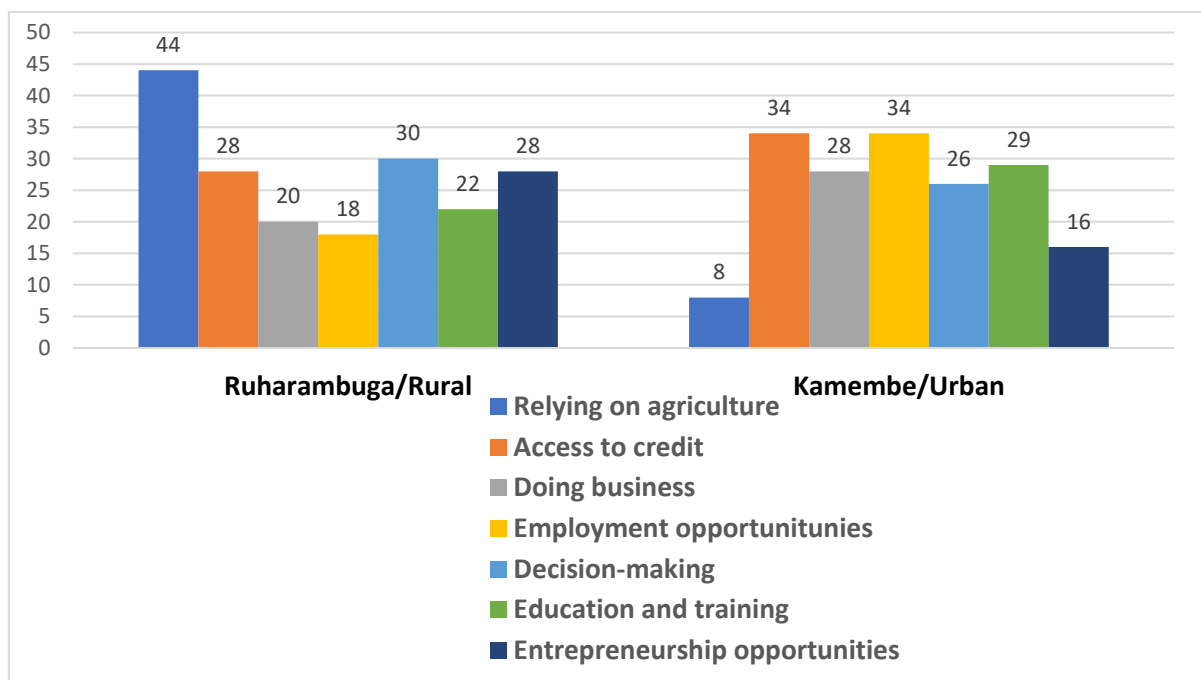


Figure 6: Respondents' views on the differential impact of gender roles on socioeconomic participation and development outcomes in Ruharambuga/rural and Kamembe/urban

Figure 6 presents respondents' views on how gender roles influence socioeconomic participation in Ruharambuga (rural) and Kamembe (urban) areas. The results indicate notable differences between the two contexts.

In Ruharambuga, the most prominent impact of gender roles is observed in reliance on agriculture, reported by 44 respondents, highlighting the central role of agriculture in rural livelihoods and the gendered division of labor within this sector. This is followed by decision-making (30 respondents) and entrepreneurship opportunities (28 respondents), suggesting that gender norms continue to shape household authority and local economic initiatives. Other areas identified include access to credit (28 respondents), education and training (22 respondents), doing business (20 respondents), and employment opportunities (18 respondents).

In Kamembe, the pattern differs significantly. The most frequently reported areas affected by gender roles are access to credit (34 respondents) and employment opportunities (34 respondents), reflecting the importance of financial resources and labor market participation in urban economies. This is followed by education and training (29 respondents) and doing business (28 respondents). Decision-making was identified by 26 respondents, while entrepreneurship opportunities (16 respondents) and reliance on agriculture (8 respondents) were reported less frequently.

Overall, the findings suggest that gender roles affect socioeconomic participation differently across rural and urban settings. In rural areas, the effects are more visible in agricultural activities and household decision-making, whereas in urban areas they are more evident in financial access, employment opportunities, and business participation.

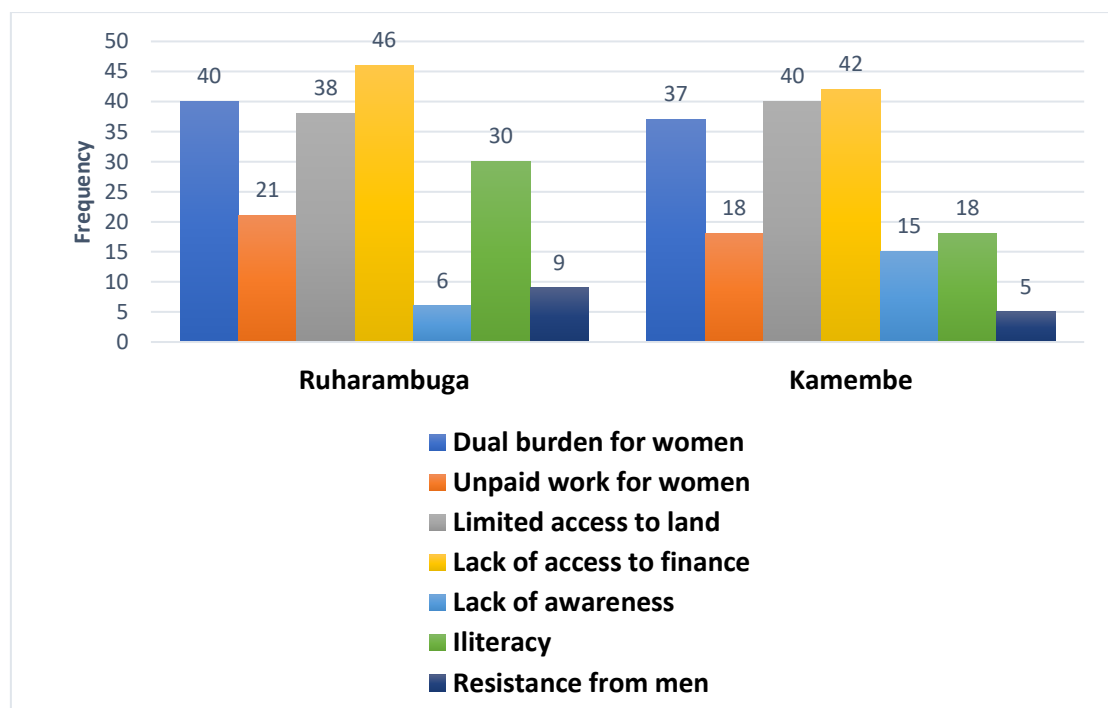


Figure 7: Respondents' Views on the Challenges Faced by Men and Women in Contributing to Socioeconomic Development

The figure above shows the frequency of challenges faced by women in Ruharambuga and Kamembe. The data highlights the most common barriers affecting women in both areas. The results indicate that the most common challenge is lack of access to finance, with 88 respondents (46 in Ruharambuga and 42 in Kamembe). This suggests that financial constraints are a major obstacle for women in both areas. The second major challenge is limited access to land, reported by 78 respondents (38 in Ruharambuga and 40 in Kamembe). This indicates that land ownership or access remains a significant issue affecting women's economic participation. Another common issue is the dual burden for women, with 77 respondents (40 in Ruharambuga and 37 in Kamembe). This reflects the challenge women face in balancing domestic responsibilities and economic activities. Unpaid work for women is reported by 39 (21 in Ruharambuga, 18 in Kamembe), Illiteracy by 38 (30 in Ruharambuga, 18 in Kamembe), Lack of awareness by 21 respondents (6 in Ruharambuga, 15 in Kamembe), and Resistance from men by 14 respondents (9 in Ruharambuga, 5 in Kamembe) This suggests that education levels and unpaid labor continue to affect women's opportunities, particularly in Ruharambuga where illiteracy is higher.

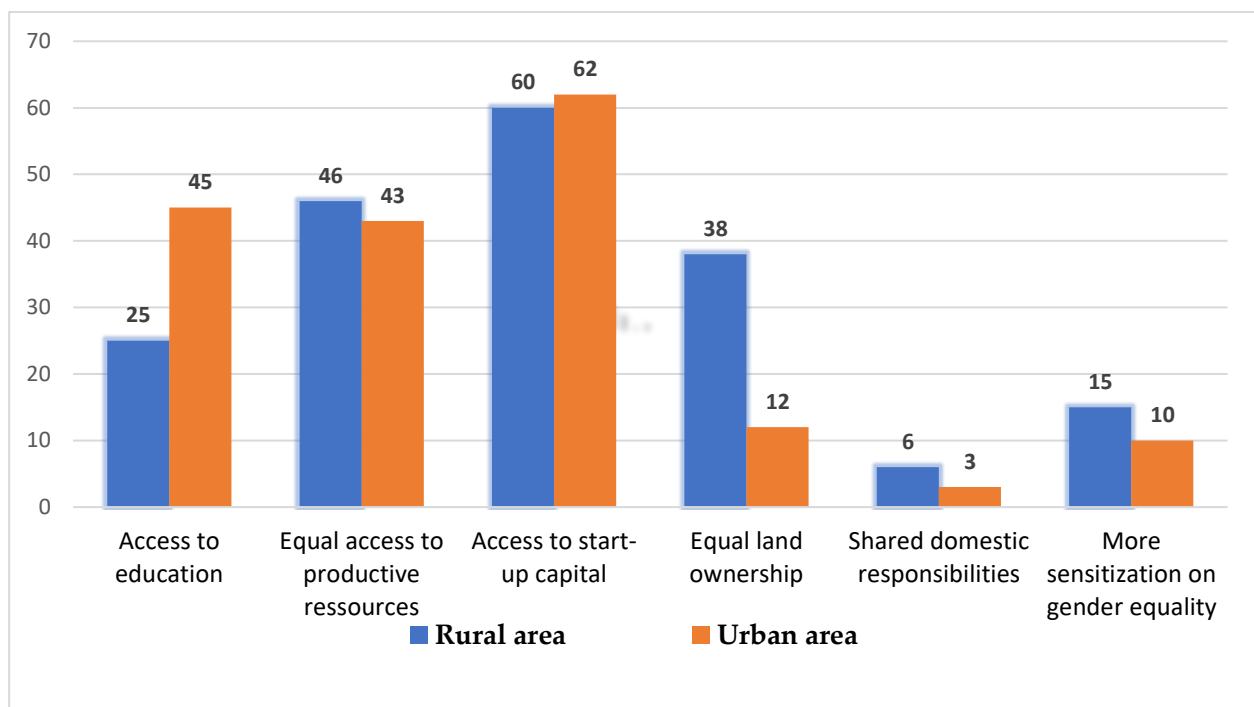


Figure 8: Respondents' views on plausible Strategies for Enhancing Gender-Inclusive Socioeconomic Development in Rural and Urban Areas

The above figure indicates that Access to education is supported by 45 respondents in urban areas and 25 in rural areas, giving a total of 70 respondents. This suggests that although education is recognized as an important factor in promoting gender-inclusive development, it is not the most prioritized strategy compared with economic empowerment measures. The slightly higher number in urban areas may reflect greater awareness or stronger advocacy for educational equality in cities.

For equal access to productive resources, 46 rural respondents and 43 urban respondents identified this strategy, with a total of 89 respondents. The almost equal distribution between rural and urban areas shows a shared recognition that resources such as land, tools, and financial opportunities are essential for empowering both men and women economically.

The strategy receiving strong support is access to start-up capital, with 60 respondents from rural areas and 62 from urban areas, giving a total of 122 respondents. This indicates that financial support for entrepreneurship is widely perceived as a crucial mechanism for enhancing gender-inclusive socioeconomic development. Access to capital can enable women and men to create businesses, improve livelihoods, and participate more actively in the economy.

Regarding equal land ownership, 38 rural respondents and 12 urban respondents supported this strategy, totaling 50 respondents. The higher number in rural areas reflects the importance of land as a key economic resource in rural livelihoods, where agriculture plays a dominant role.

Shared domestic responsibilities received the lowest level of support, with only 6 rural respondents and 3 urban respondents, resulting in a total of 9 respondents. This suggests that cultural norms and traditional gender roles regarding household responsibilities may still be deeply rooted in both rural and urban communities.

Finally, more sensitization on gender equality was identified by 15 rural respondents and 10 urban respondents, giving a total of 25 respondents. Although fewer respondents selected this option, awareness campaigns remain important for changing social attitudes and promoting gender equality.

In summary, the overall totals show 190 respondents from rural areas and 175 from urban areas, giving a combined total of 365 respondents. The findings indicate that economic empowerment strategies—particularly access to start-up capital and productive resources—are viewed as the most effective approaches for enhancing gender-inclusive socioeconomic development, while social and cultural strategies such as sharing domestic responsibilities receive comparatively less attention.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how gender roles influence socioeconomic development in rural and urban areas of Rwanda, focusing specifically on Ruhambuga Sector in Nyamasheke District and Kamembe Sector in Rusizi District. The findings indicate that gender roles continue to shape access to employment, education, decision-making power, and productive resources, although the forms of these influences differ between rural and urban contexts. These results are consistent with previous research showing that gender norms remain a significant factor in shaping economic participation and development outcomes in many societies, including Rwanda (World Bank, 2022; UN Women, 2023).

The findings reveal that employment and access to education are among the most significant factors through which gender roles influence socioeconomic development in both study areas. This result supports global evidence suggesting that gender norms strongly influence labor market participation and access to educational opportunities. According to Sen (1999), development should be understood as the expansion of individuals' capabilities, including access to education, employment, and participation in economic life. When gender roles restrict women's opportunities in these areas, not only are individual freedoms limited, but broader socioeconomic development is also constrained. Similarly, the World Bank (2012, 2022) emphasizes that gender gaps in education and labor markets reduce productivity and slow economic growth.

The results also highlight the importance of decision-making power within households and communities as a factor influencing socioeconomic participation. This finding aligns with Kabeer's (1999) conceptualization of empowerment, which emphasizes the importance of individuals' ability to make strategic life choices. In many societies, women's access to economic opportunities is closely linked to their influence within household decision-making structures. Previous research in Rwanda has shown that traditional gender norms and household power relations can either facilitate or hinder women's participation in development initiatives (Abbott & Malunda, 2016; Newbury & Baldwin, 2013). The present study therefore reinforces the argument that gender equality requires not only access to economic resources but also changes in household and community power dynamics.

The study also reveals significant rural–urban differences in the ways gender roles influence socioeconomic participation. In Ruharambuga, which represents a rural setting, gender roles are strongly associated with reliance on agriculture, household decision-making, and entrepreneurship opportunities. This finding reflects the structural characteristics of rural economies in Rwanda, where agriculture remains the primary livelihood activity, and gendered divisions of labor are particularly visible. Benería (2016) similarly argues that rural women are often concentrated in agricultural production and unpaid family labor, which limits their economic independence. Furthermore, Boserup's (1970) early work on women in development demonstrated that women's limited access to productive agricultural resources such as land, credit, and inputs can reduce productivity and hinder broader economic development. The findings of this study therefore support long-standing evidence that gender inequalities in rural areas remain closely tied to agricultural structures and resource access.

In contrast, the findings from Kamembe, representing an urban context, indicate that gender roles influence socioeconomic participation primarily through access to credit, employment opportunities, education and training, and business activities. These results are consistent with research indicating that gender inequalities in urban economies often manifest through barriers in formal employment and financial systems rather than agricultural production. Goldin (2021) notes that women in urban labor markets frequently face challenges related to occupational segregation, limited career advancement, and unequal access to leadership positions. Similarly, Grown and Buvinic

(2025) argue that gender gaps in entrepreneurship and financial access continue to limit women's economic participation, particularly in developing economies where access to credit and markets remains unequal.

Another key finding of the study concerns the challenges faced by women and men in contributing to socioeconomic development. The results indicate that lack of access to finance is the most frequently cited challenge in both rural and urban areas. This finding aligns with research by the African Development Bank (2015), which highlights that limited financial inclusion remains one of the most significant barriers to women's economic empowerment across Africa. The World Bank (2022) similarly notes that women entrepreneurs often face greater obstacles than men in obtaining loans, credit, and financial services, which restricts their ability to expand businesses and generate income.

Limited access to land also emerged as a major challenge affecting women's participation in economic activities. This is particularly significant in rural areas where land represents the primary productive asset for agricultural households. Boserup (1970) demonstrated that unequal land ownership and access to agricultural inputs significantly reduce productivity and economic efficiency in developing economies. Although Rwanda has introduced progressive land reform policies aimed at strengthening women's land rights, recent national statistics suggest that disparities in land ownership and control still persist in practice (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda [NISR], 2024).

The findings also highlight the persistent challenge of the dual burden faced by women, who often combine unpaid domestic responsibilities with income-generating activities. This observation is consistent with global evidence showing that women spend significantly more time on unpaid care and household work than men. According to the International Labour Organization (2018) and UN Women (2023), unequal distributions of unpaid labor remain one of the most significant barriers to women's economic participation worldwide. In Rwanda, national surveys similarly show that women devote substantially more time to domestic tasks and caregiving than men, limiting their opportunities for employment, education, and entrepreneurship (NISR, 2020).

The study further identifies several strategies that could enhance gender-inclusive socioeconomic development in both rural and urban areas. Respondents strongly emphasized the importance of economic empowerment strategies, particularly access to start-up capital and productive resources. This finding supports Kabeer's (1999) empowerment framework, which highlights the importance of access to resources as a foundation for expanding agency and achieving socioeconomic outcomes. Similarly, the Food and Agriculture Organization (2019) argues that improving women's access to agricultural resources and financial services can significantly increase productivity, household income, and food security.

Interestingly, the study found relatively limited support for the strategy of sharing domestic responsibilities between men and women. This suggests that traditional gender norms regarding household roles remain deeply rooted within many communities.

Butler (1990) argues that gender roles are socially constructed through cultural practices and institutional norms, meaning that changing these roles requires long-term social transformation rather than only economic policy interventions. Education, awareness campaigns, and community engagement are therefore essential for gradually reshaping attitudes toward gender equality (World Bank, 2020).

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce existing literature suggesting that Rwanda has made significant progress in gender equality, particularly in political representation and legal frameworks. However, persistent social norms and structural barriers continue to limit the full realization of gender equality in socioeconomic participation. As noted by Burnet (2011) and Powley (2005), Rwanda's gender policies have created important institutional opportunities for women, yet translating these achievements into everyday economic empowerment remains an ongoing challenge. By highlighting rural–urban differences in gender roles and economic participation, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in Rwanda and underscores the importance of context-specific policies that address both structural inequalities and cultural norms.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of gender roles on socioeconomic development in rural and urban areas of Rwanda, focusing on Ruharambuga Sector in Nyamasheke District and Kamembe Sector in Rusizi District. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative household survey data with qualitative insights from community members and local authorities, the research explored how gender roles shape economic participation, the challenges faced by men and women, and potential strategies for enhancing gender-inclusive development. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on gender equality and development by providing localized evidence of how gender norms operate differently across rural and urban contexts.

The results show that gender roles continue to influence key aspects of socioeconomic development, particularly employment opportunities, access to education, and decision-making power. These factors play an important role in shaping individuals' ability to participate in economic activities and contribute to household and community development. Although Rwanda has made significant progress in promoting gender equality through national policies and legal reforms, the findings indicate that traditional gender norms and structural constraints still affect everyday socioeconomic realities.

The study also reveals notable differences between rural and urban contexts. In Ruharambuga, gender roles are closely linked to agricultural activities, household decision-making, and small-scale entrepreneurship, reflecting the predominance of agriculture and family-based livelihoods in rural economies. In contrast, in Kamembe, gender roles influence socioeconomic participation mainly through access to credit, employment opportunities, education, and business activities. These differences

highlight the importance of considering local economic structures and social environments when designing gender-responsive development policies.

Furthermore, the study identifies several challenges that hinder gender-inclusive socioeconomic participation. The most significant barriers include limited access to finance, restricted access to land, the dual burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities, and lower levels of education in rural areas. These challenges demonstrate that gender inequality is not only a matter of social norms but also a structural issue linked to unequal access to economic resources and opportunities.

Despite these challenges, the findings also highlight potential pathways for improving gender-inclusive development. Respondents emphasized the importance of expanding access to start-up capital, ensuring equal access to productive resources such as land and financial services, and improving educational opportunities. These strategies suggest that economic empowerment initiatives, combined with educational and awareness programs, can play a critical role in reducing gender disparities and promoting inclusive growth.

Overall, this study confirms that while Rwanda has achieved remarkable progress in advancing gender equality at the policy and institutional levels, translating these achievements into equitable socioeconomic participation remains an ongoing challenge. Addressing this gap requires context-sensitive strategies that tackle both structural barriers and deeply rooted cultural norms. By comparing rural and urban contexts within the same analytical framework, this research provides valuable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and scholars seeking to design more effective gender-responsive interventions.

Ultimately, promoting gender-inclusive socioeconomic development requires a holistic approach that integrates economic empowerment, access to education and resources, and the transformation of social norms surrounding gender roles. Such efforts will not only enhance the participation of women and men in economic activities but will also contribute to Rwanda's broader goals of inclusive and sustainable national development.

7. Recommendations

7.1 To the Government of Rwanda

The Government should continue promoting gender equality and inclusive development.

7.2 To all development partners

Government institutions, financial organizations, and development partners should expand gender-sensitive financial services such as microcredit programs, low-interest loans, and entrepreneurship grants targeting women and youth.

7.3 To policymakers, land administration institutions, and agricultural development agencies

Policies should continue strengthening the implementation of Rwanda's land reform framework to ensure equal land rights for women and men. Agricultural extension services, farming inputs, and training programs should also prioritize women farmers in order to improve productivity and income generation.

7.4 To the Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education should expand access to secondary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and digital skills programs to increase employment opportunities for both women and men.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, implementation, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of this study. The research was conducted independently, and the author has no competing interests to disclose.

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