



Policy Brief: **Combating Gender-Based Violence: Legislative Strategies**

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This policy brief is part of a series derived from a three-year field program on the role of women in Rwanda. More broadly, these briefs provide policymakers, donors, and program planners with strategies for consolidation of democracy in post-conflict societies.

Widespread gender-based violence is common during and after armed conflict. Often, this pattern corresponds to a deficiency in the institutional mechanisms and rule of law meant to prevent and punish such crimes. Because women legislators frequently spearhead efforts to address gender-based violence, increasing their roles in government can be instrumental to combating the problem.

In Rwanda, where the legislature has the highest percentage of women in the world, female parliamentarians developed and drafted a progressive GBV bill in 2006. The “Draft Law on Prevention, Protection and Punishment of Any Gender Based Violence” is the first piece of substantive legislation to be introduced by the legislative rather than executive branch. Outlawing rape, including marital rape, this is the first Rwandan law to lay out a legal definition for the rape of an adult woman. It also emphasizes crimes against children.

The Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians, a legislative caucus, has been central to such legislative efforts. Open to women from all political parties and ethnic backgrounds, the FFRP was established in 1996, less than two years after the genocide. With a strategic plan that focuses on capacity building for female legislators and the analysis of new and existing legislation from a gender perspective, the FFRP has been vital in developing the GBV bill.

To build support for their legislation and avert potential opposition, female parliamentarians approached men as allies instead of adversaries. In addition to including their male colleagues in the development and introduction of the legislation, the women recruited some as co-sponsors. With backing from male parliamentarians, and using non-threatening language in the discussions and texts, the FFRP was able to frame the issue as a broad social concern—not solely a “woman’s issue.”

While developing the GBV bill, both male and female parliamentarians engaged in public consultations in town hall meetings. Through these gatherings, the FFRP gathered important information to use in drafting the law and sensitized the public to gender-based violence. These consultations also built public support for the bill prior to its formal introduction in parliament and helped defuse objections during debate in the Chamber of Deputies—in part by enabling men to hear first-hand their constituents’ perspectives on the issue. It is expected that the consultations will ease the bill’s passage and facilitate implementation.

Policymakers, donors, and program planners combating gender-based violence should invest in female parliamentarians. Women in government tend to prioritize the fight against gender-based violence, foster participatory policymaking, and retain the ties to civil society and local communities that are essential to reducing violence.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding: Female legislators often tackle gender-based violence in their legislative agendas.

→ **Recommendation:** Create alliances with women parliamentarians to combat gender-based violence.

Finding: A critical mass of female parliamentarians is crucial to their effectiveness in developing GBV legislation.

→ **Recommendation:** Advocate for constitutional provisions, such as quotas and reserved seats, that promote women's participation in government.

Finding: Women's parliamentary caucuses are important vehicles for advancing GBV legislation.

→ **Recommendation:** Provide technical and financial support to women's caucuses and encourage them to address gender-based violence in their work.

Finding: Close cooperation between government and civil society improves legislation on gender-based violence and can facilitate implementation.

→ **Recommendation:** Encourage female parliamentarians to establish and use connections with civil society organizations in shaping GBV legislation.

Finding: Public consultations build the legitimacy of legislation, provide useful data, and sensitize the public to the issues.

→ **Recommendation:** Fund public consultations to develop GBV legislation. Use consultations to educate the public about gender-based violence and to solicit their input.

Finding: The participation of both men and women in public consultations on gender-based violence generates useful information about the cultural beliefs that perpetuate the problem while also giving men and women an opportunity to share their different perspectives.

→ **Recommendation:** Involve male and female parliamentarians in public consultations around gender-based violence.

→ **Recommendation:** Ensure that consultations are open to the general public; encourage the participation of men and women, with the option of additional sex-segregated sessions to ensure that everyone contributes to the dialogue.

Finding: When male and female legislators work together to develop legislation on gender-based violence, bills are more likely to reflect both perspectives and the issue is more likely to be seen as a broad social concern.

→ **Recommendation:** Encourage collaboration among male and female parliamentarians in developing GBV legislation.

→ **Recommendation:** Provide women parliamentarians with technical assistance to draft GBV laws that use inclusive language.

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