

BUILDING A GENDER SENSITIVE WORKPLACE – STOP GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AT WORK!

Rwanda is ranked fourth globally and first in Africa for closing the gender gap. This progress can be attributed to the gender machinery (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Gender Monitoring Office and National Women's Council) that has facilitated the development of policies, laws and programs that promote gender equality. Subsequently, Rwanda has a number of legislation frameworks that directly address Gender Based Violence (GBV) such as;

- GBV National Policy on GBV which identifies reporting of GBV in the workplace as a big challenge and have contributed to the provision of services for GBV victims
- Law No; 59/2008 (Article 24) on Prevention and Punishment of GBV defines sexual harassment in the workplace as any superior exercising harassment by way of order, intimidation and terror over a person and provides penalties for such

However, despite this progress and existing legislation, GBV continues to persist through; patriarchal attitudes and poor understanding of gender equality concept, low representation of women in leadership positions in different sectors including the private sector and GBV at household level and the workplace.

GBV in Rwanda exists in all employment sectors; 58.3% in the private sector, 51.4% in the public sector and 43.1% in civil society according to a 2010 Transparency International Rwanda research in Gender Based Corruption in Workplaces. The most common forms are but not limited to; sexually suggestive language, sextortion by senior staff or colleagues in order to have access to various services/opportunities and determination of salary based on sexual interest. Females looking for employment (43.3%), females with low level positions (29.1%) and male senior officials (10,9%) as perpetrators are the groups mostly exposed to GBV in the workplace.

Despite the high level of GBV, there is a low reporting rate of up to 56.2% due to fear of consequences and stigma in the workplace and lack of understanding and evidence. With such a prevalence, it is important for employers to establish mechanisms that protect employees from such abuse.

The Rwanda Women's Network (RWN) Women Leadership in Horticulture sector project is informed by the research findings of the "Rwanda Baseline Study Report: Decent Work for Women Programme" that was conducted in 2016 by HIVOS and TDS Africa Development Innovations. The research was based on the assessment of production and working conditions from the value chain actors (producers and exporters) in the Horticulture sector including the work status of women as they form the majority of employees in the sector. One of the main findings is the little or lack of relevant policies that address gender inequalities including GBV in the workplace. Therefore, more action must be taken particularly in the private sector to create a better working environment.

International Labor Organization Gender Based Violence at work Convention

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) currently has a proposed Convention on Gender Based Violence in the world of work which needs the support of majority government members for adoption. The Convention covers the following: -

- A broad definition of gender-based violence at work; diverse forms of violence and corruption endured by workers at their workplace.
- Provisions to prevent gender-based violence at work.
- Measures to protect and support workers affected by gender-based violence.

Why is the ILO Convention on Gender Based Violence IMPORTANT?

- It would contribute to the realisation of women's rights
- It would reduce women's vulnerability and increase their economic independence and productivity at work.
- It would save money! Domestic and workplace violence costs the economy millions of dollars in health care, lost wages and sick pay!

What Can *We* Do?

Government;

As a member state of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Rwanda has an important leading role to play in promoting a regional and global agenda against GBV at work and decent work for women.

- Adopt, Ratify and Support the domestication of the ILO Convention on GBV in the workplace as it reinforces the law on Prevention and Punishment of GBV.
- Lobby other African governments to actively do the same; support, adopt and domesticate.
- Ensure respect and enforcement of laws prohibiting all forms of GBV in the world of work.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs);

- Raise awareness on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on Gender Based Violence at work and its importance.
- Collectively advocate with Trade Unions for the Rwandan government, particularly the government members of the ILO Governing Body to support and ratify the Convention.
- Raise awareness of workers on GBV in the world of work as well as their labour rights.
- Raise the consciousness of employers on GBV in the world of work and the need for gender sensitive work policies and mechanisms as well as their enforcement.

Horticulture Firms and other Employers;

- Establish workplace policies and mechanisms that promote gender equality and ensure the prevention of GBV in the world of work.
- Establish and sensitize workers on GBV in the world of work, complaint and investigation mechanisms.

- Set up provision of remedies and support for victims including protection against victimization of complainants, witnesses and whistle blowers.

To prevent, address, redress and eliminate violence & harassment in the world of work there is need for comprehensive gender-responsive policies & practices.

Adoption and ratification of the GBV Convention by governments will help enforce legislation and commitment in preventing gender-based violence & corruption at work.

Take Action Now and Stop Gender Based Violence in the workplace!