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Reflections of Rwandan Mature Women Students on the Contribution of University Studies in Improving Individual and Community Lives

By

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Abstract

The Objective of the present study is to document the contribution of University studies towards empowering mature women students in Rwanda. Specifically, this study documents how University education has contributed to improve individual and social lives of women mature students in Rwanda. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect data from one hundred and twenty mature women students located in six higher learning institutions in Rwanda. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Findings reveal that, at individual and community levels, participants in the present study maintain that university studies helped some to maintain their jobs, others to create their own jobs or take part in activities that aim to reduce poverty, develop and increase literacy as well as healthcare awareness in the community. They felt to be morally satisfied as role models to younger generations in general and their own children in particular by using their time for academically rewarding activities instead of spending time gossiping for no personal or community advancement. They advocate for continued support to the policy of open access to higher education with flexible programmes that accommodate both working and non-working women. Higher education studies increase women competitiveness and provide opportunities for better networking. Also, findings in the present study break the established stereotype that only males are destined for higher education and for specific academic domains. The study recommends the extension and sustainability of such flexible programmes to afford capacity development of mature students. Overall, the majority of respondents converge on the "better late than never" saying, and are grateful of the open access to university studies policy regardless of the students' age.

Key words: Higher education, mature women students, education and empowerment, socio economic development, Rwanda, reflection, education for development

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By

Dr. Anne Marie Kagwesage (Submitting), Dr. Charles Kabwete Mulinda, Dr. Safari Kambanda, Janvier Murenzi

Background and context

The present study was motivated by the fact that Rwanda needs a skilled, knowledge-based workforce with proactive attitudes to support the transition to a middle income country. The Government of Rwanda recognises the need for qualified and skilled human resources to address the imbalance in the supply and demand of skilled labour, and is committed to ensuring that there are skilled workers available on the labour market to meet the actual labour market demands (EDPRS II 2013-2018). Progress has been made in the last decades, but still education has been and is a significant bridge to break the gap and match with the social development opportunities offered by the country's labour market.

In the Rwandan context, women make up more than half of the population and play many vital roles in the domestic and public spheres. With regard to education, women are the first teachers of their children and their role continues even when their children are already married adults. With reference to education and other spheres of responsibility, women have traditionally been neglected and sidelined. The 1994 post-genocide education policy is trying to address the issue of "Education for All", seeking to give opportunities to gender balance and equal access to education from primary to higher levels (MINEDUC 2008, National Gender policy 2010, University of Rwanda Gender Policy 2016). Following the current expanding and open access to higher education, the age factor is no longer among the criteria for university studies selection. At whatever age and stage they get an opportunity to study, Rwandan women are encouraged to enrol for university studies for the good of the country. It is in this regard that this research project was undertaken in order to gain knowledge on how and to what extent university education contributes to empower mature women students to become skilled agents who contribute to their personal and community's social development.

Statement of the Problem

With reference to previous studies in the Rwandan context, scholars have carried out research on varied and different aspects of gender, but the aspect of gender and education remains under researched. For example, Bayisenge, Hojer, and Espling (2015) investigated women's land rights in the context of land tenure reform, and they mainly focused on policy makers. Kagaba (2015) studied the experiences of women vis-à-vis gender equality laws, and she concentrated on women in rural areas. Carlson and Randell (2013), Sleggh, Barker, Kimonyo, Ndolimana, and Bannerman (2013) as well as Doyle, Kato-Wallace, Kazimbaya, and Barker (2014) researched on the involvement of men in gender equality initiatives. Cherry and Hategekimana (2015) focused their investigation on ending gender based violence through empowering women at

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grassroots levels, while Hebert (2015)'s study related to gender violence and human rights issues.

With regard to gender and education, existing previous studies investigated the gender education gap between girls and boys at primary, secondary and tertiary levels in terms of enrolments and study areas (Huggins and Randell 2008, Masanja 2010, Randell and Fish 2011, Russell 2016). However, little or no research have been conducted in relation to mature university educated women on duty, which the 1994 post-genocide Rwanda considers as another facet of gender empowerment, in relation to Rwanda historical education background. Therefore, our study aims to address this knowledge gap. The study documents how University studies have contributed to equip women with knowledge and skills they need for their personal and societal advancement. Throughout the study, we hear the voice of real beneficiaries while they reflect on how higher education studies afforded them to develop either at a personal or societal levels. The study focuses on mature women students. In this study, mature women students are those women who completed secondary school and stopped for job occupation. They started university studies years later, and they combine their studies with their jobs. So, they are enrolled in one of the various flexible programmes that higher education in Rwanda offers. Some are in evening programmes, others in week end programmes.

It is hoped that this study will help researchers and the community at large to understand the relevance of University studies especially for mature students. Also, the study will provide research based evidence with regard to the contribution of university studies in improving individual and community lives, and eventually encourage other mature students to embark on university studies regardless of their age. Furthermore, considering the Rwandan context where research on the interplay between higher education and individual or societal advancement reveal to be scarce, the present study will contribute to expand existing knowledge, increase research output and literature through reflections of mature students on how higher education contributed to their individual and community development. Hopefully, the study will inspire further national, regional or even global research on the topic to advance new knowledge.

Education and women empowerment

Previous studies worldwide evidence the link between education, empowerment and socio economic transformation (Bandiera 2012, King and Hill 2010, Kober 2016, Malik and Courtney 2010, Mc.Lean and Modi 2016, Murphy-Graham, E. 2012, Sperling, and Winthrop 2015, Swarna 2010 etc).

In their article entitled higher education and women's empowerment in Pakistan, Malik and Courtney (2011) explore to what extent participation in higher education offers empowerment to women in Pakistan. In their study, they surveyed female academic staff and students from ten higher learning institutions and found that their respondents enjoyed economic independence and an increased standing within family and society they achieved thanks to participating in higher education. Also, their findings revealed that participating in higher education enabled women to impact on some discriminatory practices and consequently brought about change for the better. Thus, they recommended designing educational strategies that

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promote gender equality in all areas of Pakistan and increase female students' participation in higher education.

These findings in the Pakistan context corroborate earlier findings by King and Hill (2010) that rising levels of education improve women's productivity in the home which in turn can increase family health, child survival, and the investment in children's human capital. According to them, the social benefits from women's education range from fostering economic growth to extending the average life expectancy in the population, to improving the functioning of political processes (King and Hill 2010).

In a related development however, Jayaweera Swarna (2010) investigated women, education and empowerment in Asia and reached the conclusion that there is no positive linear relationship between education and the economic, social and political empowerment of women, due to constraints posed by gender ideologies and socio economic structures. Jayaweera (2010) reached such a conclusion by examining the relationship between education and several facets of empowerment based on macro statistics on countries in Asia presented in the 1995 United Nations Human development report, which attempts to compute country specific gender empowerment measures, as well as data from qualitative studies in selected representative countries.

Although the author might have drawn such a conclusion in line with the methodology used, a number of other scholars worldwide still argue for the direct positive link between education and women empowerment. In their book entitled "What works in girls' education: Evidence for the world's best investment", Sperling and Winthrop (2015) argue that education contributes to the acquisition of skills that will lead to better employment and health outcomes. Through education, girls, and by extension women in this particular study will acquire specific literacy and competence skills they need in order to communicate, negotiate and engage in bureaucratic world. Thus, the authors believe that the educational return of investing in girls and women propels them towards empowerment and the corresponding benefits.

In the same line of reasoning, Murphy - Graham (2012) proposes that empowered individuals through good education understand, and are aware of their worth and the obligation and ability to contribute to individual and social wellbeing. Through her book, "Opening Minds, Improving Lives: Education and women empowerment in Honduras", Murphy- Graham contends that education empowers individuals to contribute to their personal and social transformation. According to her, empowered individuals through education, in this case women, develop the capacity to critically analyse their lives, and broader society and take action towards personal and social advancement. The empowerment aspect in this case extends beyond "one's own internal transformation to include having an impact externally on the greater community" (Kober, 2016). By focusing on "good" education, she maintains her earlier remark that while education can trigger the empowerment process if it expands women's knowledge and understanding, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity, caution should be observed before assuming that education and empowerment go hand in hand (Murphy-Graham, 2008).

In line with the above mentioned world literature, evidence in the African continent also support the education-empowerment link. In a study in the Nigerian context on empowering

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women through higher education, Fopohunda Tinuke (2010) concludes that existing educational gap between men and women limits opportunities and impacts negatively on the development of women. The author contends that higher education is a veritable tool for female empowerment and national development and therefore believes that since the number of women involved in higher education in Nigeria is still limited, chances of developing on a personal or societal levels remain limited as well (Fopohunda Tinuke 2010). Empirical evidence in Tanzania also show that women with disabilities believed in the empowering nature of higher education (Tuomi et al.2015).

In Rwanda, supporting policies to empower women through higher education and even all other levels of education exist (University of Rwanda strategic plan 2016, Gender policy 2016, Ministry of Education 2008 etc). However, empirical evidence that documents how such enabling policies have been implemented, studies that give voice to beneficiaries to voice the empowering nature of the educational opportunity they received remain scarce. Therefore, this study was initiated to address this knowledge gap. The study documents how University studies have contributed to equip mature women with knowledge and skills they need for their personal/ individual and societal development.

Aims and research questions

The overarching objective of the present study is to document the contribution of University studies towards empowering mature women students in Rwanda. Specifically, the study documents how University education has contributed to improve individual and social lives of women mature students in Rwanda. The study answers the following questions:

1. What kind of benefits did Rwandan mature university students get as a result of their University education?
2. What was the contribution of university studies in improving students' individual and community/social lives?

Methodology

Findings presented below resulted from a mixed method approach to data collection (Bryaman 2012, Kothari 2009). Data mainly came from questionnaires submitted to one hundred and twenty mature women students in their final year of the university studies. Questionnaires were used as a research tool to reach out on many women mature students. As many of the mature women study on week end or evening programmes, some of them requested to take the questionnaires with them and hand them back the next time they came to the university, or send them back via a colleague if they were to be absent for any reason, which we accepted. Also, questionnaire data gave us general qualitative answers that we wanted to follow up further during our individual interviews. Respondents were selected from six higher learning institutions, three public and three private institutions across the country just to get views from women in the whole country. In this regard, we select one private and one public University in the southern province, two public and one private university in Kigali city, one private university in the northern province and one private university in the Eastern province. Although the Western

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province was not included due to the fact that the universities in that particular area had just commenced and did not have students in year four, mature women from the western province who attend the selected universities were included in our sample. The Northern and Eastern province did not have any public universities that had flexible programmes to accommodate mature women students.

Individual interviews were also used to supplement questionnaire data, and twenty two interviewees were selected based on the answers they gave on questionnaires. Interviews took place in 2016, almost a year after collecting the questionnaire data. At this time, most of the women mature students had graduated and could tell what they had benefited from the university training either individually or in the society they live in. The present study draws on twenty two individual interviews, and the respondents are aged between 30-60, the majority being aged between 35-45. Each interview lasted for twenty five minutes on average. The researcher had to seek for prior informed consent before recording the respondents. Questions were phrased in English, but respondents were free to respond in a language of their choice. Twenty one respondents out of twenty two responded in Kinyarwanda, and one responded by mixing French, English or Kinyarwanda depending on the question. Overall, this study is qualitative in nature. Interview and questionnaire data were transcribed verbatim and translated, we hired research assistants to help us in the task.

In line with ethical considerations and the principle of informed consent, it was clearly explained to our respondents that the data would be used for research purposes only and they were allowed to participate or withdraw from the study any time they wanted. Also, respondents were promised that their real names will not appear in the paper to abide by the anonymity principle. Instead of their names, codes are used where the first letter is F to mean female, then the next letter stands for the place where the interview took place, e.g. H for Huye, M for Muhanga, K for Kigali, then a number based on how respondents followed one another during interviews. An example of a code is FH1, which means that this is a female interviewee from Huye and she was the first to be interviewed.

Data were analysed thematically (Boyatzis 1998, Bryman 2012) and actual quotes were selected to support claims and the identified themes and sub themes (Kothari 2009, Braun and Clark 2006).

Findings

In this section, we highlight personal and community benefits that mature women got as a result of undertaking university studies. Also, through the respondents' voice, we record mature students' reflections on how university studies contributed to improving the mature women's lives as well as the community's. We use extracts from interview and questionnaire data to support ideas that mature women put forward. As interview and questionnaire extracts are in Kinyarwanda, we use extracts from the translated interviews and questionnaire data.

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Personal and community benefits resulting from undertaking university studies

This section highlights some of the benefits that mature students enjoy either at a personal or community level as a result of undertaking university studies. The benefits are reported using three major categories, that is, material/economic benefits, community/social benefits, and moral benefits. The impact of the studies on the community/ society is discussed as well

1. Material/economic benefits.

The first aspect of material or economic benefits that was considered in this section relate to whether their university studies afforded them to have a new job, a well-paying job or some kind of promotion at the work place in such a way that they managed to increase family income.

Evidence from the questionnaire and interview data show that our respondents hold different views. The majority did not get any new job or any well-paying job just because they had undertaken or completed university studies. Primary school teachers and nurses said that their university degree cannot bring them any salary increment or promotion as long as they are still teachers in primary school or work as nurses, because a university degree is not required to be a primary school teacher or a nurse. Others did university studies in areas that are not related to their work. For example, a secretary who undertakes university studies in Economics does not get any promotion or salary increase as long as she remains in the secretary position, as opposed to a secretary who trains in secretarial studies at the university. This category of respondents, just as many other respondents in this study remain optimistic and satisfied, arguing that they made the right investment and hope for a bright future. For them, they feel confident and ready to apply for any better position once opportunities pop up, as will be detailed in 2 below. To support this, FK1 said:

I completed my university studies but my salary is still the same and I was not promoted either. However, I gained knowledge and skills and I even have my degree. Now I feel confident that I can apply for any job position that matches my qualifications. You know even here in the school people apply for upward positions, they write exams and when they succeed they get the position. Now I feel confident and I will apply once a position in my area comes on offer. I will do the exam and succeed, I do not fear any more. I am confident with the knowledge and skills I got from the university (FK1).

FH2 also supported the idea that although they did not enjoy any financial gains after completing university studies, they have the potential to career advancement.

No, there is no increase in the salary. But they told us that if they get vacant positions we will get the positions as we have required skills. But even if we do not get new and well paying positions, for us we are contented because at least we

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feel that we have the right skills for our position, we perform well and successfully deliver on our current job.

Other respondents mentioned that instead of adding on family income, their university studies consumed even the little income they had.

No, my university studies have not yet added anything to our family income. Our income was rather reduced because we combined paying school fees for my university studies, for the kids' school and we even rent a house. It is not easy you know (FK5).

In some cases, paying for their university studies dried up their family revenues and they had to sell properties or take loans. For example, FM11 lamented that she had to sell her piece of land in order to pay for her university studies. Here, it could be argued that the students made an investment that is likely to yield returns in the future.

In yet other categories of responses, it appears that paying for school fees consumed the family income but pushed them to adopt strategies that in the end revealed to be paying. One of the responses on the questionnaire was:

It was not easy to pay for university studies. We had to work hard in order to cope with the hard situation, we practised modern farming thanks to the skills I had just acquired and from the yield we even managed to buy a plot on top of being able to pay school fees (FI5).

My husband stopped working to undertake medical studies abroad, I stayed alone at home with my income to cater for all the needs in the home, the rent, to pay for my husbands' fees and the kids' school fees and mine. I do not remember any time I lived without a loan. I was all the time taking loans to pay for all these things as I was the only one to have an income. It was very hard. At the same time I had to make some small savings at my work place. We have a saving scheme at our workplace but my loans always exceeded my savings. I managed to build a house on my own. Though I am still paying the loan, at least I was relieved of paying rent. I struggled yes, but our future will be bright (FM1)

From the above, it is clear that mature women made investment in undertaking university studies. It was not easy, but some of them have already started to reap from the investment they made. As they mentioned, some of them survived the public service restructuring simply because they were doing university studies or they had completed, otherwise they could have lost their jobs.

While university studies did not directly link to income increase from the workplace, respondents maintain that they got the skills necessary to start their own business and participate in activities aimed at reducing poverty.

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To be honest, now that I have completed my university studies, I do not really plan to remain in the public service. I had so many important courses related to business. During my studies, my target was not only the degree, but most importantly the skills that I would use in my own business. Now that I have got the skills, I plan to start my own business very soon (FH2).

FK6 also supported the idea of being involved in activities that aim to reduce poverty thanks to skills gained at university.

I am still in my job position, my salary did not increase and I have not got any promotion yet. But thanks to the knowledge I gained, I have some small projects that top up on my salary. I belong to a tontine, this gives me an opportunity to network with others, I saved little money and overtime got a loan that I used to open and run a shop. This shop helps my neighbours as they shop near them. It also help me through the extra income it brings in our home.

Others started modern farming projects, small scale animal farming projects and even bigger projects in the pipeline. The majority plan to apply for bank loans as they feel confident to manage them and are no longer afraid of taking risks, all this thanks to the skills they gained at the university. This will impact on the community and society at large as detailed below

2. Community and Social benefits

As mentioned by many of our respondents either through the questionnaire data set or interviews, university studies increased the reading culture of women mature students, opened up their minds through readings and discussion with peers. They can now make informed choices and confidently take action on different social issues such as violence, health care awareness, and school choice for the kids, literacy practices, etc.

On the issue of violence, none of our respondents admitted to have instances of gender based violence or discrimination in their homes. However, they accepted that at times they witness gender based violence in their neighbourhood, and they confirmed to be well placed to provide advice. On this issue, FK20 responded the following:

There is no instance of violence in my home. I advise those who have violence in their homes and they trust and follow my advice, and they constructively build their families. The psychology I learnt helps me to reduce violence in my neighbours' homes (FK20).

Our respondents pointed to our attention that thanks to reading books as required by university studies, they are aware of different kinds of violence and they do their best to explain to other women when they meet in tontines or cooperatives. One female interviewee from Huye said:

There exist many kinds of violence. We distinguish gender based violence, property based violence and others. The culture of reading books developed and raised during my

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university studies opened up my mind and helped me to understand the issue of violence, I read related laws and explain to my fellow women when we meet in tontines or cooperatives, so that they also understand and work together towards preventing any kind of violence. (FHI interview).

Concerning health care awareness and nutrition, reflections seem to be balanced. With the questionnaire responses, many respondents said that they did not improve nutrition for their kids' growth because much of their income was spent in paying school fees, and they did not remain with enough money to buy nutritious food. However, others maintained that they managed to improve the nutritional value for their kids' growth since they planted new crops such as vegetables to cope with the decreased income as a result of paying school fees for parents and children. On the health care issue, FK3 maintained that in her village on the day of community works, she is responsible of sensitizing fellow village mates to pay for health insurance, and they trust and obey her better than other leaders who come from outside the village.

As far as selecting schools for kids and developing literacy skills is concerned, mature women students support that university studies opened up their minds and empowered them to send their kids to good schools, and to help them in their different take home tasks and assignments. University studies raised their awareness that they can only guarantee a bright future to their kids if they send them to good schools and give them the right support right from a younger age.

You see, during our time our problem was that we were not able to go to good schools. But when university studies opened up my mind and with the skills and abilities I gain from my university studies, I decided to send my kids to good schools so that they do not get the same fate as mine. Of course good schools are very expensive but I am glad they study well, I manage to give them the right support and one of them succeeded the national exam and I was very happy (FK3).

Still on supporting the kids in their schooling, FM3 expressed that university studies helped them to give the right support to their kids in their assignments.

Before I was not even motivated to help kids in their assignments because I was not that keen on reading either books or note books. But later on I noticed that as a parent, I should advise my children on how to go about their studies. During my university studies, it became a bit easier to help my kids because I would also read, I would do research and I would tell my children how to proceed, what to do in their studies so that they succeed. As a fellow student though at a higher level, I was knowledgeable (FK7).

In the same line of reasoning, questionnaire data also support that University studies opened up mature women's mind to confidently make informed choices. Although respondents used their own words, many converged on the view that when you have not attended university studies, you are like blind. You always need somebody either your husband or your boss to help you in

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decision making, you fear to make your own choices. But with university studies, you get knowledge and skills to make your own decisions and you even advise others when they need help. University studies developed mature students' constructive personal and social attributes that bring about moral satisfaction as detailed below.

3. Moral benefits

Evidence from interview and questionnaire data show that thanks to university studies, mature women students developed constructive personal and social attributes such as self-confidence, self-esteem and self-satisfaction that are important for their family life, community /society life and workplace. As one interviewed woman pointed out, "*studying at the university built confidence in me, and this is very important since I believe that you cannot fail in anything when you are confident in what you do*". (FK5). Building upon this self-confidence attribute brought about by university studies, FH2 happily mentions that at least she is given the floor in the district management meeting where she works and she expresses herself confidently in the managerial audience while she could not do it before undertaking University studies. Based on the quality of ideas she contributes with, the team lauds her that she did not waste time to go to the university at such a later age.

In addition to the self-confidence and satisfaction they enjoy at the workplace, they even serve as role model to their families, neighbourhood and community around them. The following extract from FH2 support this claim.

Even in my home area, I serve as a role model and encourage many fellows to go to university. When they look at me at my age, you know I will soon be sixty, I studied and graduated officially, and some of my workmates and home neighbours decided to start their studies, taking me as their model. They alleged that it could be a shame to fail to complete university studies while an aged woman like me has succeed. Even in the family, kids are encouraged to study hard so as to succeed like mum, and attain the highest academic level (FH2).

They are also satisfied with the ICT literacy and knowledge of the foreign languages they developed at the university.

ICT develops at a high speed and you can't study at the university without using a computer and internet in research or other assignments. Now computers have become our best friends whereas we used to fear them. You can't do anything without a computer. The same with English. Before we could not hold a conversation in English but I managed to develop my English in such a way that I no longer fear to use it even in meetings (FK6).

Considering that working and studying at the same was time consuming, mature students learnt how to manage their time and felt morally satisfied that the time they had was used for academically rewarding activities instead of moving around gossiping. FH4 said:

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I assure you, it is not easy to undertake studies at a later age. You are not sure if you will succeed, but you go anyway. You leave all the house hold tasks and you concentrate on your studies. Our studies push us to manage our time in such a way that we do not lose even one minute, and you find that our homes are more organized than before compared to the time we have. No time to gossip any more. We cut on the time we used to spend in gossiping and we use all the time for work, family and academically rewarding activities, on the computer, internet or reading books.

All in all, based on the above mentioned mature students reflections, it is clear that University studies have elevated them from one stage to another one. The economic, community and moral benefits they enjoy as a result of undertaking university studies, coupled with the impact such benefits have on the wider community they live in provide empirical evidence to support that it was worth sacrificing their time, family, energy and material resources for their individual, familial and societal development at large.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study has investigated the contribution of higher education towards personal and community/ societal development. The focus was on mature women students who combine studies and work occupations. The findings in the present study are in line with earlier research on the link between education of women in general and development (Kober 2016, Graham-Murphy 2012, 2008, etc). In addition, the present study brought to light some empirical evidence that, if given opportunities, women in Rwanda and probably elsewhere stand to positively contribute towards societal advancement through higher education studies. The present discussion focuses on the potential of mature students, who were previously intellectually left behind, to contribute to community development in Rwanda thanks to University studies.

Indeed, empirical evidence in this study show that higher education developed mature women intellectual capacities and afforded them to greatly participate to their individual and community development. This falls in line with Fopohunda Tenuke' (2010) suggestion that women should be looked at as individuals that possess some hidden potentials for greatness. To develop their potential to the fullest, the author proposes that it is necessary to expand women's access to educational opportunities, facilities for skills acquisition and positions of authority. In the present case, access to higher education was extended to mature women, and the above mentioned reflections speak a lot on how they developed either at individual or community level. This also seem to be aligned with Davis (2001) who found that the progress that nations make is strongly related to the quality of human resources and educational attainment of its citizens. Opening access to higher education for this group of women who were previously intellectually left behind revealed to be one of the important ways of investing in human capital for community and societal development. As different scholars pointed out, Human resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations Fopohunda Tenuke' (2010).

Considering the nature of women and their role in the society, the present study also align with previous findings that benefits derived from university studies extend to the whole family,

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the society and the whole country. As Davis (2001) pointed out, a well-educated woman will perform creditably well her responsibility to the home and society at large. This will ensure blissful homes, well-educated and well-behaved children and contented husbands and an endowed nation. Interesting and specific findings to the Rwandan context is that mature women seem to be very much contented not only by the material/ economic benefits that are likely to derive from higher education, but also and most importantly the moral benefits they enjoy as a result of completing university studies. For example, they are very happy to have used their time for academically rewarding activities instead of gossiping, and to be role models to younger generations and their children. It could be argued that, with time management skills and role models to mentor future generations, young females stand even a better chance to contribute to their individual and social development of Rwanda. Research will be needed to prove this claim though.

Overall, it emerged that mature women enjoy varied benefits ranging from material/economic, community as well as moral benefits as a result of their university studies. Although some are yet to reap economic benefits because they are still in the same job position, others are already contented economically or materially as a result of workplace promotion or the started poverty reduction initiatives and income generating activities that increased their family income. Concerning community benefits, the university studies raised their awareness to take part in activities that reduce gender violence and discrimination, developed literacy practices, opened up their mind to make informed choices, healthcare awareness and nutrition. Moral benefits related to self-confidence, self-esteem, self-satisfaction, time management and role model to younger generations and own children.

Whether family members and the community value the contribution brought about by university studies for these women calls for further investigation. For example, taking an employer perspective, it would be worth to investigate how mature students improved their performance at the workplace as a result of the skills gained at the University level. Also, the students' experience and challenges in combining work, studies and family occupations would be another topic worth researching.

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