

**AGENCY FOR COOPERATION AND RESEARCH IN DEVELOPMENT (A.C.O.R.D)**

**Kigali, Rwanda**



**Name:** A.C.O.R.D

(Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development/ Association de Coopération et de Recherches pour le Développement)

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## 1.0 Introduction: The context and the GALS methodology

Rwanda is predominantly rural, with 91% of its population involved in agricultural activities. Women form the 52% of the population, with nearly one third of households headed by women (mainly widows or single women). Although this is a high ration in favour of women it has dropped from 54% shortly after the genocide in 1994. As for most of the patriarchal societies, in Rwanda gender inequality is evident as women are often employed in labour intensive and low value added activities.

There are multiple factors that have contributed to women's impoverishment such as: the discriminatory laws and traditions prohibiting women's land ownership and inheritance rights—leaving women without adequate collateral to obtain credit to support either on- or off-farm income-generating activities.

Since 1994, as mentioned in the overview provided by the country paper on Rwanda, the Government of Rwanda has taken meaningful steps demonstrating its commitment toward gender equality and is giving considerable and serious attention to gender issues to improving women's situation. However, gender inequality is still very present, overall among rural people, strongly effecting country's development at the household and community levels.

In this framework, the GALS as a gender empowerment methodology for value chain development aims at providing rural and illiterate people with the tools to face the situation and increase their livelihoods.

According to Josephine Kasande, Oxfam Novib consultant on GALS, *“the GALS is a methodology that uses a number of tools based on a framework or a plan, which is the life journey. Those tools play a critical role and have different purposes: there are tools of analysis, planning and action. First people identify through the analysis what are the main issues in their lives so that they can work on solving those issues and improve their livelihood.”* Josephine continues saying that *“GALS is a methodology that enables illiterate people to communicate using symbols and images. It is a very powerful approach for people to use the information produced during the discussions in their own time and place. They do not need to be on a workshop setting to use the tools but they can do it at their house with their family. The result is that people own the methodology and are able to manage the learning according to their needs.”* Finally, Josephine concludes, *“GALS does not end with itself, but it represents a mean. GALS must be linked to some form of livelihood work or project that add value to the analysis produced because, if it situated on its own, it might face serious challenges.”*

ACORD, DUHAMIC ADRI and BAIR started implementing the **GALS methodology to enhance gender justice** among projects working on **value chain development**.

### The GALS methodology in the East and Southern Africa (ESA) region

Under the framework of the IFAD funded programme in the ESA (East and Southern Africa) region and within the WEMAN global strategy, Oxfam Novib designed a three (3) years project in partnership with ten (10) Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to adopt the GALS methodology for the value chain development approach.

The project main objective is: “to contribute to sustainable pro-poor wealth creation, and value chain upgrading in Uganda, Rwanda and Nigeria through empowerment of women and men from the poorest and most vulnerable households and the establishment of equitable participatory processes for economic decision making at all levels.”

In Rwanda ACORD, DUHAMIC-ADRI and BAIR are the three organizations that were selected to implement the GALS methodology among its members and beneficiaries in value chain development projects.

## 2.0 The Agent of Cooperation, Research and Development (ACORD): origin, structure, mission and objectives



ACORD international is a Pan African developmental organization with interventions in 18 African countries. Funded over 30 years ago ACORD is one of the oldest and largest Pan-African organisations.

ACORD's **governance** is structured as follows:

- *Countries programme offices*, run by around 375 local staff, who lead and implement the majority of ACORD's work
- A secretariat in Nairobi with a second office in London, run by 25 international staff. The secretariat coordinates implementation of pan-African programme work and provide technical backstopping and support to country offices
- Board of Trustees which provides guidance and oversight<sup>1</sup>

ACORD's **vision** is *to reach a society in which all citizens are equally able to achieve their rights and fulfill their responsibilities.*

ACORD's **mission** is *to work in common cause with people who are poor and those who have been denied their rights to obtain social justice and development and be part of locally rooted citizen movements.*

In Rwanda, ACORD programme is based in the capital city of Kigali and work in six districts across the country: Musanze in the North-West, Gicumbi in the North-East, Kirehe in the East, Bugesera in the South, Kamonyi in the center and Ngorerero in the West.

ACORD has been working in Rwanda since 1979 implementing a wide range of projects focused on the empowerment of civil society and aiming at reducing poverty and challenging exclusion and discrimination.

### **ACORD's partners**

ACORD in Rwanda works in partnership with organization and groups who share their aims and values. ACORD is supported by a wide range of international donors and by the local Government. The main international organizations from which ACORD has been receiving and receive support are the Big Lottery Fund (UK), Comic Relief (UK) CUTS (Consumer Unity and Trust Society) International, the European Union, Jersey Overseas Aid and Oxfam<sup>2</sup>. Those mainly provide funds to specific projects mostly related to social welfare (mainly gender, childhood and HIV-AIDS control programmes), agriculture and value chain development.

The Rwandan government also supports ACORD's field projects mainly on food security through the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Local Governance, Planning and Trade. At a national level, ACORD strengthened linkages with several local development partners and active civil society organizations in Rwanda. Among those, we can mention ARDI, ARAMET, DUHAMIC and CCOAIB that are involved in sustainable market value-chains, as well as issues on gender and

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [www.acordinternational.org/about-us/about-us/governance](http://www.acordinternational.org/about-us/about-us/governance)

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem

advocacy and GUTERIMBERE, a local association for the development of vulnerable women and girls.

### **ACORD's projects and areas of operation**

The main activities and ongoing projects of ACORD in Rwanda are developed around the following issues: securing women's land rights, Gender advocacy, supporting child headed households and implementing internal and external mainstreaming of members with HIV and AIDS. To this end, since 2004 ACORD worked to support 114 *ihuriro* (social forums) implementing its projects through the forums also with the support of local partner organizations across Rwanda combining practical activities with advocacy.

An *ihuriro* -a Kinyarwanda word for 'to meet'- is traditionally a collective community formed to discuss and take action on several issues concerning the household and the community. The Social forums are based on the traditional cultural values of reciprocity and solidarity and are self-created and organized based on common needs and activities.

Members of the social forums traditionally perform *solidarity actions* among the population such as working together on each other's land in turn and utilizing similar systems for rotational cash saving, transport for sick people, caring for elders or rebuilding a house<sup>3</sup>.

#### **ACORD AND THE IHURIRO**

ACORD promotes a pro-poor approach, the *Ihuriro*. Utilizing the traditional structure of the social forums ACORD works with those groups of people in rural communities to implement its development projects.

By empowering the social forums *ihuriro*, ACORD in Rwanda is at the forefront in providing space for a positive opportunity to strengthen social movements in the country, providing pertinent analyses rooted in experiences with the communities, and helping community voices to participate in the larger context<sup>4</sup>.

ACORD organization is very experienced on this approach aiming at strengthening structures and dynamics of social demand at the grass-roots through capacity building and awareness raising of development actors from local communities, civil societies and government, and also through being part of the social movements in/on Africa for advocacy and social action, while continuing its grass-root interventions that give the social action agenda its foundations<sup>5</sup>.

ACORD's work is unique in engaging citizens in true and free debate on policy issues related to poverty eradication and to build trust and confidence. People need to value their role in poverty alleviation hence be equipped with the necessary skills and tools to generate resources from their own investment. The *ihuriro* constitute a process by which ordinary citizens will revisit their traditional and cultural values, on which they can rehabilitate the collective action against poverty and hunger. The *ihuriro* is the foundation of empowerment of citizens: together against poverty!<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Source: [www.acordinternational.org](http://www.acordinternational.org)

<sup>4</sup> ACORD Rwanda, 2010: "Strengthening the Capacity of rural population to advocate for their rights to sustainable livelihoods and food sovereignty." Kigali, March 2010

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem

In Rwanda 52% of the population is female and nearly one-third of households are headed by women (mainly widows or single women). Gender inequality is evident and women are most often employed in labor intensive and low value added activities<sup>7</sup>. As a result, all ACORD's projects have a gender dimension and work mainly with women and girls head of households, who are considered the most vulnerable among the rural population.

With the aim of reaching and supporting those vulnerable members and to promote gender balance, in 2002 ACORD created the '*caucuses*' and the '*Child head of Household groups*'. Through these groups, similarly to the spontaneous social forums, ACORD organizes vulnerable women and girls who are at the head of the household providing them with the freedom to engage to social and communitarian life. The future vision for ACORD is for them to become autonomous social forums.

Jeanine Kabanyana, gender advocate and GALS focal point for the ACORD organization in Rwanda, when asked about ACORD's main activities on Gender empowerment, states that: *"ACORD in Rwanda provides training and legal assistance for its members on gender issues such as land property rights, gender based violence and family transformative education. On land rights, as an example, ACORD provides the most vulnerable members with financial support and with other tools to facilitate land registration. To engage with strategic partners, ACORD also organizes discussion groups with the women national council, local authorities, primary school head masters, among others."*

Among the main projects ACORD implemented and that are linked to gender empowerment it is key to mention the Gender Mainstreaming and Leadership Trajectory (GMLT). The project that ended in 2011 was supported by Oxfam Novib and focused on women leadership in workplace and in programmes.

ACORD in Rwanda mainstreamed GALS as a gender empowerment methodology among projects working on value chain that are implemented following the *ihuriro* approach.

At a community level, based on the vulnerability criteria and on the proximity of the forum to the value chain, ACORD identified three (3) groups working in value chain (Banana, Soy Bean and Red Onions) that operate in three (3) different districts.

The leading group to implement GALS among its members are the Banana farmers in the district of Kamonyi.

According to what defined in the project design for the implementation of GALS, each partner organization should form a committee that is responsible to coordinate the GALS activities.

ACORD's GALS committee is composed by: (i) two (2) representatives from each groups of beneficiaries that were selected to be trained on GALS, (ii) two (2) representatives from the private sector and (iii) two (2) GALS experts.

At a national level, ACORD took the leading role for the coordination of the other two (2) local organizations in Rwanda: DUHAMIC-ADRI and BAIR. As leader of the committee, ACORD must collect information from the partners and integrate them in a narrative and financial report.

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<sup>7</sup> "Oxfam in Rwanda." Unpublished. March 2012

### 3.0 The GALS in the territory of Kamonyi

#### The economic, political and social context



Figure 1 - Kamonyi District, Southern Province.  
Rwanda

Kamonyi District is one of the eight districts of the Rwandan Southern Province. It is located in the central region of the country and it is composed of 12 sectors, 59 cells and 317 villages (imidugudu). The District shares its borders with Ruhango District in the South, Muhanga District in the West, Bugesera and Nyarugenge districts in the east, Gakenke and Rulindo districts in the North. Its population is of 265,365 inhabitants on a total surface area of 655.5 km<sup>2</sup>. Thus, its average density is 404.8 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.

The District of Kamonyi enjoys a moderate climate

with frequent rainfall and an average temperature of 20°C. Its relief is made of low-lying plateau, except in the western part which is more mountainous.<sup>8</sup>

The economy of the District is primarily based on agriculture and livestock farming with other sectors being developed progressively. The food production is concentrated on the growing of cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, sorghum, soybean, peas, bananas, Irish potatoes, rice, groundnuts and maize. Livestock farming in Kamonyi District include cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, poultry, etc.

The District is an autonomous administrative entity by its legal and financial status. Like other administrative entities, the District promotes solidarity among its population, democracy and a socio-economic development<sup>9</sup>.

Kamonyi doesn't have an efficient town plan. The settlement, up to now, is still dispersed, almost 99% of the houses are not well constructed and they are dispersed on the slopes of the hills. It is still low the number of people who live in villages. This dispersed settlement does not allow people to easily get access to essential development needs and it is not favorable for agriculture development. As a matter of fact, it is not good to cultivate or graze on scattered pieces of land.

In Kamonyi district the majority of farmers perform solidarity actions by being organized in social forums (IHURIRO) and Caucuses (women groups formed by ACORD, as mentioned above).

<sup>8</sup> Source: [www.kamonyi.gov.rw](http://www.kamonyi.gov.rw)

<sup>9</sup> Source: [www.kamonyi.gov.rw](http://www.kamonyi.gov.rw)



#### 4.0 What can we learn from ACORD?

ACORD, similarly to the other organization in Rwanda, recently started implementing GALS for value chain development. ACORD is in fact now in the process of completing stage two (2) of the GALS methodology, the “Community Design Process”. The GALS champions are, as a result, currently engaged with the training on the GALS tools for the second stage. In order to reach that step, a workshop was organized to introduce the tools to the GALS facilitators and focal points.



Figure 2 - GALS meeting, Kamonyi District

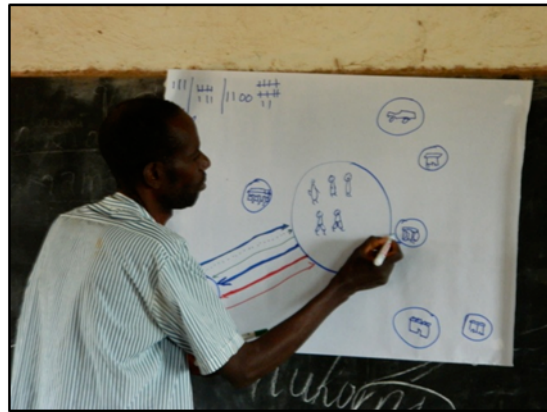


Figure 3 - Empowerment map

#### Implementation strategies

According to the GALS methodology and based on the project design, ACORD selected among the ongoing projects working on value chain development the ones to benefit from GALS as a gender transformative empowerment methodology.

At a community level, based on the vulnerability criteria and on the proximity of the forum to the value chain, ACORD identified three (3) groups working in value chain (Banana, Soy Bean and Red Onions) that operate in three (3) different districts (Kamonyi, Bugesera and Ngorerero).

In order to identify the thirty (30) champions to benefit from the GALS approach, the group selected them through a participatory process facilitated by its leader.

ACORD beneficiaries are poor and vulnerable men, women and youth. In the specific, GALS members were selected, based on specific vulnerability criteria, among the following categories: elders, HIV/AIDS affected persons, widow/widower of genocide, women with husband in prison or exiled, girls head of HHs.

A lesson learned and powerful strategy carried out by ACORD during this phase is to define specific criteria for the selection of champions based on vulnerability.

As previously mentioned, GALS champions selected by ACORD are organized in social forums and caucuses. Those groups, based on solidarity actions, use debates and group discussions on individual and social aspects, among other issues, and its members are used to the sharing in a group dynamic. Finally, to choose those groups and projects for the introduction of GALS as a gender empowerment methodology it is considered as a successful implementation strategy.

## **Empowerment strategies and Peer Learning Structures**

ACORD in Rwanda put in place a strong leadership to drive the GALS implementation among its beneficiaries and members working on value chain development projects. Jeannine Kabanyana, head of gender advocacy department and GALS focal point, together with Vedaste Mwenende, Monitoring and Knowledge Management Officer, took the leading role organizing the meetings with the champions. The meetings take place every two or three weeks with the aim of discussing among the group members on the GALS tools and its applicability at an individual and household level. Jeannine provided the champions with a constant and efficient training following the group closely.

ACORD staff's commitment to the methodology resulted with its members, the GALS champions, owning the tools despite the early stage of its implementation. In order for the champions to use the tools at the individual and household levels and being GALS a community led approach, it is crucial that they own the methodology.

Finally, as Jeannine resulted to be a talented facilitator who masters the GALS tools and its applicability, she often supports other facilitators in the region with the GALS tools.

As for the implementation of the **peer learning structures** among the members of the community, the project only reached stage two of its implementation and, as a result, the champions have not yet started sensitizing or training other people of the community on GALS. However, most of them have already started sharing the method and the first GALS tools with family members, friends and neighbours often using as an example their own experience.

### **5.0 The Way forward: challenges and opportunities**

According to Vedaste Mwenende, Monitoring and Knowledge Management Officer, during this initial phase of the GALS implementation, the main challenge is its sustainability. As a matter of fact, the methodology needs to be appointed to other projects to support its implementation. Consistent funds are in fact needed to activate the networking, to provide for the material and for the logistics for the meetings and for the facilitators to reach the communities.

Other common challenges the methodology face are the lack of seriousness rural people, mainly men, link to the use of images and symbols and the difficulties people in the rural communities, often illiterate and elderly, face with the drawing.

On the other hand, there are many testimonies that highlight the opportunities offered by the GALS tools to rural people working in value chain development. *"When you plan you have a direction"*: this is one of the main lesson people could mention when asked about GALS. To have a vision and a plan in life and to share it with your husband or wife can help people move forward, improve their conditions and reach development.

The GALS methodology provide vulnerable people with several tools that might help them to guide them to plan for their activities both at a household and business levels and this allows to face gender issues along the value chain approach. As a matter of fact, "many local organizations are requesting to be trained on the GALS approach so that they can pass it to their projects

because of its relevance for the communities. Also, the local authority wish that all people could use the GALS to support them to complete the contract of performance they must submit.”<sup>10</sup>

### **The context**

As a matter of fact, among the main opportunities detected during the first approach ACORD members had with GALS and looking at the future vision on GALS, it is worth to mention the role of the local authorities. As already mentioned while describing the context and the role of the district and the sector, the local authorities are sensitive to gender issues and their role and involvement at a cell and sector levels is crucial for the project to sustain itself in the future.

The context as such constitutes for rural people in Rwanda a challenge and an opportunity. In fact, at a country level, the Rwandan political situation and recent history brought the country to a closure with the external agents as well as with the internal actors within the value chain such as the private sector. As a result, rural and vulnerable people face many challenges to establish linkages with other stakeholders in the value chain to improve their performance. On the other hand, in Rwanda infrastructures are decentralized and it is fairly accessible to people at a village and sector level to reach and to access services and governmental infrastructures.

During the post-genocide period, the Rwandan Government aimed at providing victims of the genocide (mainly women and children but also disable people) with the needed assistance. Its policies focus on the most vulnerable, especially women. Specific pro-poor and gender-oriented laws are now present and followed strictly and to mention few examples, people have easy access to services such as family planning and land registration at a district as at a country level.

Nowadays, Rwanda is the only country in the world with a female majority in Parliament; the idea of change is present in people’s mind and at a government level. The current setting is reflected on the GALS as external factors intervene and influence the methodology and its applicability.

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<sup>10</sup> ACORD Rwanda, 2010: “Strengthening the Capacity of rural population to advocate for their rights to sustainable livelihoods and food sovereignty.” Kigali, March 2010