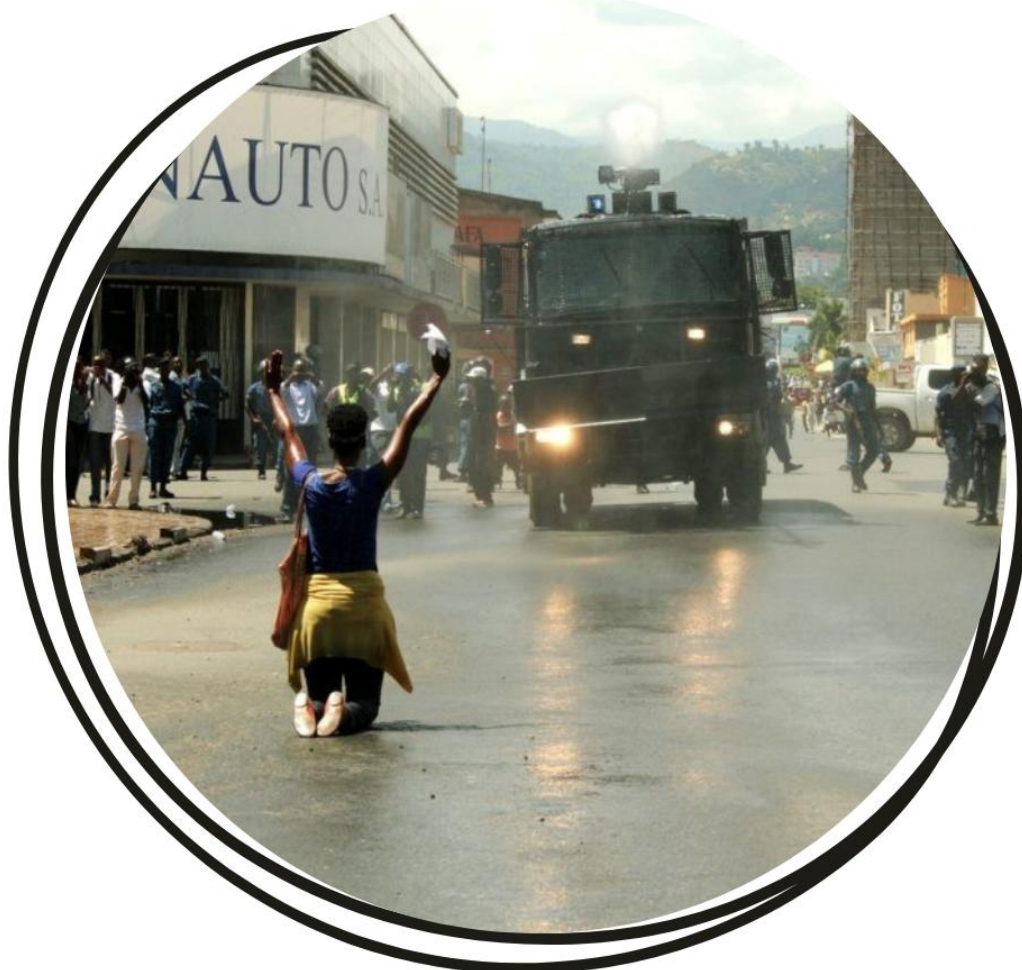




COALITION
BURUNDAISE
DES DÉFENSEURS
DES DROITS DE
L'HOMME
CBDDH

**STUDY TO DOCUMENT THE EXPERIENCE OF
BURUNDIAN WOMEN INVOLVED IN THE 2015
NON-VIOLENT PROTEST MOVEMENT AGAINST
THE CONTROVERSIAL THIRD TERM OF
PRESIDENT NKURUNZIZA**



**Summary of the report
February 2025**

Table of Content

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Context.....	1
1.2. Objectives of the study.....	1
1.3. Methodological approach.....	1
II. LEGAL FOUNDATIONS FOR WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROTEST MOVEMENT AGAINST THE THIRD TERM.....	1
2.1. International framework for freedom of demonstration	1
2.2. Regional normative framework	1
2.3. National normative framework	2
III. DOCUMENTARY REVIEW OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION IN BURUNDI.....	2
3.1. The involvement of Burundian women before the 2015 protest movement	2
3.1.1. Burundian women and decolonisation	2
3.1.2. Women and the struggle for equal rights	2
3.1.3. Burundian women acting for peace.....	2
3.2. Involvement of Burundian women during the 2015 protest movement	2
3.3. Involvement of Burundian women after the 2015 protest movement	3
3.4. The involvement of women elsewhere in peaceful protest movements	3
3.4.1. Arab spring.....	3
3.4.2. Peace negotiations in Liberia	3
IV. EXPERIENCES OF BURUNDIAN WOMEN INVOLVED IN THE 2015 PROTEST MOVEMENT	3
4.1. Political context and women's motivations.....	3
4.2. Impact of the Arusha agreement on women’s mobilization	3
4.3. Resource mobilization and social organization	4
4.4. Women’s solidarity and support networks	4
4.5. Forms of engagement of Burundian women.....	4
4.5.1. Active participation in demonstrations	4
4.5.2. Logistical and humanitarian support.....	4
4.5.3. Advocacy and the role of women-led trade unionists	4
4.5.4. Digital mobilization and social media engagement	4
4.6. Obstacles and sacrifices	4
4.6.1. Specific violence and repression targeting women	4
4.6.2. Professional and family sacrifices.....	5
4.7. Impact and legacy of women’s engagement.....	5
V. GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	5
5.1. Conclusion	5
5.2. Main recommendations:.....	5

I. General introduction

1.1. Context

President Nkurunziza's third-term bid in 2015, despite constitutional and Arusha Agreement limits, sparked widespread peaceful protests. Despite their political marginalization, Burundian women played a key role in these demonstrations, facing significant risks and challenges.

1.2. Objectives of the study

The study aims to enhance the recognition of women's crucial role in Burundi's 2015 protests and to foster their future participation in peace and social justice efforts by documenting their involvement and exploring their political impact globally.

1.3. Methodological approach

Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study employed surveys translated in Kinyarwanda, in-depth interviews, and focus groups to capture diverse personal experiences and structural dynamics.

II. Legal foundations for women's involvement in the protest movement against the third term



Photo 1 : Peaceful protest march of women in the streets of Bujumbura

recognize the right to peaceful protest and women's participation in peace processes and social movements.

2.2. Regional normative framework

At the regional level, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Charter on Democracy emphasize the right to peaceful assembly and the importance of women's participation in public affairs management.

Women's participation was legally grounded in international instruments and National frameworks.

2.1. International framework for freedom of demonstration

At the international level, texts such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), and the UN Resolution 1325

2.3. National normative framework

Burundian women's right to peaceful demonstration in the 2015 protest was supported by national laws, including the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (2000) and the Burundian Constitution of March 2005. The Law No.1/28 (2013) regulates public demonstrations and meetings in Burundi and states (Art1) that public meetings and demonstrations are free in the country.

III. Documentary review of the involvement of women in the process of social and political transformation in Burundi.

3.1. The involvement of Burundian women before the 2015 protest movement

3.1.1. Burundian women and decolonisation

Burundian women's first documented resistance occurred in 1955 when women from Buyenzi opposed a tax on unmarried women imposed by Belgian colonial authorities. During decolonization, women played a central role in independence efforts, leading to the creation of the Union Culturelle des Femmes Burundaises (UCFB) in 1960 and contributing to the UPRONA party's 1961 electoral victory.

3.1.2. Women and the struggle for equal rights

After independence, Burundian women focused on legal reforms for gender equality. The Union des Femmes Burundaises (UFB) campaigned for reforms, including the 1980 Persons and Family Code. While full gender parity wasn't achieved, their advocacy continued, leading to the 1992 democratic constitution and the creation of organizations like the Association of Women Lawyers of Burundi (AFJB). The 1993 revision of the Code removed many discriminatory provisions, marking a key success.

3.1.3. Burundian women acting for peace

After President Ndadaye's 1993 assassination and the ensuing civil war, Burundian women, led by urban intellectuals, formed associations for peace and conflict resolution. The Collectif des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi (CAFOB), created in 1994, protested the 1996 embargo and pushed for women's participation in the Arusha peace process. Despite initial exclusion, women gained observer status in 2000, and their efforts led to a 30% quota for women in decision-making bodies in the 2005 Constitution.



PHOTO 2: Burundian women with Nelson Mandela, mediator in the inter-Burundian peace negotiations in Arusha.

3.2. Involvement of Burundian women during the 2015 protest movement

Burundian women, drawing from their Arusha peace process experience, played a key role in the 2015 protests against President Nkurunziza's third term, managing organization, logistics, and lobbying. Despite reprisals, they led successful demonstrations and later shifted to peace-building and Human rights after the failed coup and violent repression.

3.3. Involvement of Burundian women after the 2015 protest movement



Photo 3: Resilience of Women in Exile: Refugee women learn sewing with the support of Maison Shalom in Rwanda.

Following the political crisis and failure of the East African Community mediation by 2018, Burundian women in the Movement of Women and Girls for Peace and Security (MFFPS) continued advocating for peace, women's rights and against sexual violence. In 2020, a new Burundian women's movement called the "Women and Girls Inama-horo Movement" appeared in women's activism, focusing on advocacy for peace and the fight against gender-based violence in Burundi. New women initiatives to strengthen

the capacities of refugee women and support their economic integration and resilience have multiplied.

3.4. The involvement of women elsewhere in peaceful protest movements

Women globally have played pivotal roles in political and peace movements. A few examples provide a witness of this, and lessons can thus be drawn for the benefit of future generations of committed women.

3.4.1. Arab spring

During the Arab Spring, women played key roles in protests and on social media despite facing threats and violence. In Egypt, girls defied norms by staying in Tahrir Square overnight; in Tunisia, women spread information; and in Yemen, activists like Nobel laureate Tawakkul Karman led protests.

3.4.2. Peace negotiations in Liberia

During Liberia's civil war, women's "Liberia Mass Action for Peace" campaign, including a "sex strike" and physical blockades at negotiation sites, successfully pressured leaders into peace talks, leading to the 2003 peace agreement.

IV. Experiences of Burundian women involved in the 2015 protest movement

4.1. Political context and women's motivations

In 2015, fears of civil war and Nkurunziza's power grab motivated Burundian women to mobilize for peace, human rights, and political change.

4.2. Impact of the Arusha agreement on women's mobilization

The Arusha Agreement initially promised stability and democratic inclusion for Burundians. In 2015, Nkurunziza's bid for a third term was seen as a betrayal, especially by women who viewed the agreement as a safeguard for their security and families. They were defending not only political participation but also a social contract representing their hopes for a stable and peaceful future.

4.3. Resource mobilization and social organization

Resource mobilization was key to the 2015 Burundian protests. Despite limited resources, women used social networks, time, and finances to support the movement, providing logistical aid, raising awareness, organizing, and offering psychological support. They also set up discreet fundraising for essentials, minimizing risks of reprisals.

4.4. Women's solidarity and support networks

Female solidarity was crucial to the success of the mobilization, offering material, emotional, and psychological support. This unity, transcending political differences, helped organize resources, provide for families, and sustain the movement's resilience against repression.

4.5. Forms of engagement of Burundian women

4.5.1. Active participation in demonstrations

Burundian women were crucial in the 2015 protests against President Nkurunziza's illegal third term. Their visible presence, often with children on their backs, symbolized resistance to injustice and a call for peace. Women led key demonstrations, especially on May 10 and 13, 2015, taking charge of processions in Bujumbura. Their involvement brought emotional depth to the movement, gaining international attention and strengthening the legitimacy of the popular demands.

4.5.2. Logistical and humanitarian support

Burundian women also organized food and medicine distributions and sheltered activists fleeing authorities. Despite heavy surveillance and repression, their ability to mobilize resources demonstrated their organizational strength and dedication to the cause.

4.5.3. Advocacy and the role of women-led trade unionists

Women trade unionists played a key role in mobilizing international support for the 2015 protests. They used their positions to pressure the government, raise awareness about human rights violations in Burundi, and frame the struggle as part of a broader human rights defense, thus increasing external support.

4.5.4. Digital mobilization and social media engagement

Young women, both in Burundi and abroad, played a vital role in spreading information about the protests and repression through social media. They used these platforms to bypass censorship, share videos, photos, and testimonies, and amplify the movement's visibility, demonstrating the power of social media in modern peaceful protests.

4.6. Obstacles and sacrifices

4.6.1. Specific violence and repression targeting women



Women protesters violently dispersed by the police with tear gas and water cannons in Bujumbura streets

Women in the 2015 protests faced severe, gendered repression, including arrests, beatings, and sexual violence. Despite these efforts to intimidate them, the violence strengthened their resolve. They also endured threats, harassment, and psychological pressure, while facing patriarchal attitudes and limited support structures.

4.6.2. Professional and family sacrifices

Women involved in the 2015 protest movement made significant personal and professional sacrifices, including giving up important positions to dedicate themselves to the cause. Many faced exile, detention, and torture, with single women in refugee camps enduring precarious conditions. Family pressures led some to return home, but it was a matter of survival for their country.

4.7. Impact and legacy of women's engagement

The involvement of Burundian women in the 2015 protests left a lasting legacy in the fight for democracy, inspiring youth and redefining women's roles in society. Their resilience and peaceful mobilization are now recognized as a significant example, aligning with the United Nations Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Their actions have highlighted the crucial role of women in peace and stability, paving the way for greater female participation in peace processes both in Burundi and globally.

V. General conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

Women's participation in the 2015 protest was legally grounded in their right to peaceful demonstration. Their mobilization was part of a broader global movement for women's rights, as they played a key role in defending justice, human rights, and peace. Through solidarity, advocacy, and international alliances, they transcended political and ethnic divisions, inspiring future generations and contributing to a lasting citizen awakening. Despite brutal repression, their resilience shaped the protest's narrative and the struggle for better governance.

5.2. Main recommendations:

1. Ensure equal political and institutional representation of women based on competence at all levels of governance.
2. Empower women through quality education and awareness of gender-based rights and social justice from an early age.
3. Strengthen women's solidarity and advocacy by supporting women's organizations and sharing experiences, including with those in exile.
4. Leverage digital platforms to mobilize support, raise awareness, and amplify women's voices for better campaign coordination.
5. Promote women's financial independence through training and entrepreneurial support to enable their active public participation.