

The Initiative for Inclusive Security

A Program of Hunt Alternatives Fund



Engendering Rwanda's Decentralization

Supporting Women
Candidates for Local Office



T H E R W A N D A P R O J E C T

Engendering Rwanda's Decentralization:

Supporting Women Candidates for Local Office

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The Initiative for **Inclusive Security**

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THE INITIATIVE FOR INCLUSIVE SECURITY (including the Women Waging Peace Network), a program of Hunt Alternatives Fund, advocates for the full participation of all stakeholders, especially women, in peace processes.

THE RWANDA PROJECT is designed to demonstrate how women's leadership in a post-conflict country can be pivotal for the development and stabilization of society.

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About the Author

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Key Findings

The Election and Implementation of the Quota

1. In the 2006 local elections, Rwandan women won 33.3 percent of mayor and vice mayor posts at the district level nationwide and 66.6 percent in the capital city of Kigali. The increase in the number of women in local government over 2001 elections is attributable in large measure to enforcement of a 30 percent quota at the local level and the preparation of over 2,300 potential candidates.
2. Quotas, such as Rwanda's 30 percent mandate, are critical for increasing women's representation in local government. The interpretation of those quotas, however, is equally important. While women compose 33.3 percent of three-person district executive committees, thereby nominally fulfilling the quota, women are only six percent of district mayors.
3. The majority of women elected to district government in 2006 are serving as "vice mayor for social affairs." That post includes the gender, youth, culture, and health portfolios. This is a significant increase in responsibility from the 2001 system, which saw many women slotted into the post of "vice mayor for gender."
4. Lack of timely information inhibited candidate preparation in Rwanda's 2006 local elections. The complicated decentralization process, re-districting, and the late announcement of election dates also influenced the ability of candidates to effectively campaign.

Identifying Barriers to Women's Participation and Designing Programs to Overcome Them

1. Local government can present significant barriers to women's participation in decision-making processes because of local rules, traditions, and customs of authority. Despite Rwanda's quota, female candidates identified numerous obstacles to their participation in the elections.
2. Capacity building programs should be designed to work in concert with quotas, thereby improving both the quality of women candidates and increasing their number.
3. Training for potential women candidates is extremely effective when it provides role models to build women's self-confidence, allows for candid discussion in a safe environment, and passes on useful experiences and concrete skills, such as strategies for campaigning.
4. In designing training programs to encourage women's participation as candidates, it is beneficial to:
 - a. partner with local organizations that have wide reach at the grassroots level;
 - b. plan the training well in advance of local elections, even before election dates have been announced, if necessary; and
 - c. design a program that addresses the unique obstacles that women candidates face.

Introduction

In May 2003, Rwanda adopted a constitution that established a 30 percent quota for women's participation in all "decision-making organs."¹ Parliamentary elections held later that year, which included a separate "women's election" to fill the reserved seats, vaulted Rwanda to the top of world rankings for women's participation in government.² Women hold 39 out of 80 seats (48.8 percent) in the Chamber of Deputies and nine out of 26 seats (34.6 percent) in the Senate.³ Women therefore make up 45.3 percent of Rwandan parliamentarians. These statistics can be compared to an average of 17.5 percent women's participation in national parliaments worldwide and an average of 17.9 percent in Sub-Saharan African parliaments.⁴

Despite impressive numbers at the national level, women's representation in local government in Rwanda lagged. Local elections in 2001 used an innovative "triple ballot" to guarantee women's participation; nonetheless, women were elected to less than 30 percent of seats on district councils. Most of those elected were serving as vice mayor for gender, a mandate with limited scope. Despite the existence of a 30 percent mandate in the 2003 constitution, nothing was done to bring local governments into compliance until local elections were held in 2006.

In late 2005, in anticipation of the 2006 local government elections and in partnership with local organizations, The Initiative for Inclusive Security sponsored a candidate training program designed to reach rural and grassroots women. This program, the 2006 elections, and Rwanda's commitment to fulfill its quota at the local level, coincided with a massive re-districting and decentralization effort in Rwanda.

As a result of the 2006 elections, women now hold 33.3 percent of mayoral and vice mayoral posts at the district level nationwide and more than 60 percent in the capital city of Kigali. Though women are still predominantly serving as vice mayors, not mayors, their relative power has increased as portfolios have been consolidated and the number of districts reduced.

This report has three parts. In part one, a brief literature review surveys the current research and analysis on women and local government, describing why women are important to public policy at the community level as well as considering the advantages and challenges of decentralization for women. Part two outlines the ongoing decentralization process in Rwanda, how it affected the 2006 local elections, and how women fared. Part three discusses the obstacles women face despite the existence of the quota and shows how The Initiative for Inclusive Security's training program helped prepare women to overcome these challenges.

Part One: Women in Local Governance—Findings From Around The World

Local government is a powerful force in women's lives, often affecting the delivery of basic services (such as healthcare) and the management of resources (such as land, electricity, and water) more directly than the national government.⁵ Although comparative statistics on women's participation in local government are incomplete, particularly with regard to Asia and Africa, the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) published a global survey in 1998 that estimated women's participation at the local level generally to be higher than their presence at the national level.⁶

There is evidence, however, that the relative levels of women's participation in Europe and North America—where women generally are a larger percentage of local government officials than national representatives—may not hold in developing countries. The Sub-Saharan African average for women's participation in national parliaments is 17.8 percent, and six of the top 20 countries in the world are in Africa.⁷ At the same time, women's participation in local councils in Africa is estimated to be less than five percent.⁸ This disparity may be due to the expanded use of quotas at the national level in Africa, which increases the number of women in national decision-making bodies but does not always affect local representation. In South Africa, for example, the African National Congress enacted a women's quota for the national and provincial electoral lists but not for the local lists. While this resulted in the much-heralded 29 percent women's representation in the national government in 1995, women were only 19 percent of local government councilors.⁹

Other data on women's participation in local government in Africa suggests that the five percent average figure is misleading given the large disparities between different countries.¹⁰ Sierra Leone, for instance, provides a counter example. In that post-conflict country, while women are only 15 percent of parliament, they are 50 percent of the very local "ward development committees."¹¹ And a growing number of African states are choosing to extend quotas to the local level, including Uganda and Rwanda, where women must now constitute 30 percent of local governance structures.

Advantages and Challenges of Decentralization for Women

Decentralization is the processes by which a central government formally cedes political, administrative, or fiscal power to lower, more territorially local, levels of government, often with the aim of improving democracy and achieving greater efficiency in the delivery of public services.¹² Theoretically, decentralization can offer greater opportunities for inclusive governance that is more responsive to local needs.¹³

Such an emphasis on increased citizen participation would seem to offer opportunities for women and other groups that have been traditionally excluded from politics. In Uganda, for instance, decentralization has been a vehicle for increasing women's participation. Since 1995, one-third of local government seats in that country have been reserved for them. Decentralization is also posited as a way to make service delivery more gender-sensitive, by giving local officials, who are closer to their constituents and therefore theoretically more approachable, the ability to respond to women's needs.¹⁴

Whereas politics at the national level is characterized by what can be called a "male organizational gender bias" in which the system is structured to better value and reward the qualifications of men,¹⁵ barriers to women's entry into local government are sometimes lower.¹⁶ Eligibility criteria for office often are less strict at the local level. In Rwanda, candidates at the national level must have a university degree, but at the most local level—the cell level—even literacy is not always a requirement. This openness facilitates women's participation, as they are less likely than men to have had the benefit of formal education.

Sometimes the activities of local government can be easier to combine with family responsibilities than national politics, which is more time-consuming and may require moving to the capital.¹⁷ Women who entered South Africa's first post-apartheid parliament experienced difficulty balancing family and political responsibilities.¹⁸ They had to fight to end nighttime parliamentary sessions, which conflicted with their family

responsibilities.¹⁹ In another bid for flexibility, they also instituted child-care services in the parliament, which are used by both male and female parliamentarians.²⁰ In order for women to engage in activities of governance, especially if those activities require a full time commitment, they require freedom from family responsibilities and from the need to earn an independent income. These criteria may be more likely to be met at the local level, where women can more easily balance family and work responsibilities and engage in part-time politics.

In addition, local politics may appeal to women more than national politics because they have experience dealing with the issues that local government controls.²¹ Women who have not had access to formal education may also find local government more accessible because meetings and proceedings are more often conducted in a local language.²² A study of women elected as councilors in India found that the majority were illiterate or barely literate and had little or no previous political experience, which would suggest that local government can be an entry-level political opportunity.²³

In fact, there is some evidence that women's participation in local governance can be a gateway to their greater involvement at the national level. In Europe, the increase in women's representation at the local level has been accompanied by a rise in women's participation in national decision-making bodies. The 1997 election in the United Kingdom, in which unprecedented numbers of women entered the House of Commons (bringing their total representation to 18 percent of the parliament), has been identified as part of a larger national trend. As part of that movement, women now compose 27 percent of local councilors.²⁴ One study found that 71 percent of female Members of Parliament (MPs) interviewed had come into their post after previously serving as councilors in local government.²⁵

Local government also presents significant and specific barriers to women's participation in the decision-making process. First, proponents of decentralization may fail to consider "the *politics* of decentralization" that "determine *who* can best take advantage of decentralization."²⁶ If local government becomes more powerful as a result

of decentralization, its attractiveness as a site of authority tends to encourage men's participation—often at the expense of women.²⁷ Because tradition and informal norms, often deeply patriarchal, may operate more strongly at the local level, women can be particularly disadvantaged by the devolution of power. Jo Beall explains the problem in her analysis of decentralization's relationship with gender in southern Africa:

One of the reasons why local governance is so often a disappointing arena for women is that it is often responsive or open to informal institutions and relations of power that undermine or bypass formal rules and procedures.²⁸

Second, depending on the structure of decentralization, local governments may be able to set their own rules for eligibility criteria and decision-making processes in ways that exclude women in spite of formal quotas. Amendments to the Indian constitution established *panchayats*, or institutions of local governance, and also mandated that women constitute one-third of councilors. Even so, some *panchayats* instituted rules that only women with a maximum of two children were eligible to serve as members; and quorums for voting were sometimes set deliberately low so that high-level men could meet and make decisions without women present.²⁹ Women

in Uganda have often been relegated to minor positions inside local government, even though by law they must constitute one-third of councilors, and they frequently are expected to serve food at council meetings.³⁰

Third, even mandatory quotas can be circumvented through surrogate representation of women by male relatives. Women are sometimes subject to intimidation or abuse if they violate cultural or religious norms by participating in local government structures.³¹ And fourth, even in countries like Rwanda, where there is a marked commitment to women's participation³², the way in which the quota is interpreted can limit women's advancement. As discussed below, the 30 percent quota has been interpreted to mean 30 percent of district executive committees (composed of the mayor and two vice mayors), not 30 percent of mayors.

Because tradition and informal norms, often deeply patriarchal, may operate more strongly at the local level, women can be particularly disadvantaged by the devolution of power.



Woman candidate addressing voters during campaign. Photo credit: Elizabeth Powley

Why Women in Local Government?

Because of local government's daily impact on the lives of women and their families, women's participation is often viewed as an extension of their traditional roles as household managers. There is also some evidence that women's political behavior exhibits a greater concern with local issues and constituent relations than that of men. Research from the United Kingdom demonstrates that women politicians at the national level prioritize constituency work, such as helping individuals with problems, holding meetings with constituents, and representing local interests in parliament, more often than do their male peers.³³ Women spend more time per week engaged in constituency activities and receive more letters from constituents than do male MPs.³⁴ Likewise, women councilors in South Africa stated that they believed they focused more than the men on issues of community needs.³⁵

One of the best case studies for evaluating the impact of women's participation in local government comes from India and the *panchayat* system, mentioned above.

In a review of studies on these structures and women's participation, Niraja Gopal Jayal notes that most surveys have found that women address the needs of fellow women by focusing on water infrastructure, children's education, and gender and matrimonial issues.³⁶ Measurable differences exist between districts led by women and districts led by men in terms of which issues received greater attention from local government. For example, districts led by women are less likely than those led by men to invest in informal education but are more likely to invest in adult education, of which women are more likely to be beneficiaries.³⁷

Similarly, a study of women's presence on local councils in Norway found that increases in female representation during the 1970s and 1980s correlated with improved policy outcomes related to provision of child-care.³⁸ Municipalities with more than 50 percent women on their local councils provided more childcare services between 1975 and 1991. In Uganda, women on local councils have initiated a number of projects that benefit the community, such as growing vegetables and rearing goats for milk.³⁹

Field research from Rwanda indicates that women candidates and officials are perceived as likely to address the social and economic welfare of their constituents, and women candidates also identify these as their priorities.⁴⁰ A Rwandan woman who served on the local council in the former Butare province explained:

The few of us [women] who are in leadership have demonstrated that women are capable of doing great things when given opportunities to do so... Whenever women have an opportunity to decide, you will find that health and education are more important. And our society needs better health services and education needs to be improved. Women are needed for our country's development.⁴¹

A former female vice mayor for gender issues echoes the same sentiment, "Women naturally are more sensitive to issues related to the welfare of the society. When we have many women leaders, the welfare of our country will be improved."⁴²

Though research on gender and corruption is far from conclusive, there are interesting findings about gender and perceptions of honesty. In Uganda, women are more likely than men to be appointed to secretary of finance posts on local councils, perhaps reflecting essentialist notions of women as more honest than men.⁴³ Research in Rwanda, too, has demonstrated that, particularly at

the local level, women are viewed as less corrupt than male counterparts.⁴⁴

Women's presence in local government also seems to affect attitudes towards women and gender relations. In India, families report greater sharing of household responsibilities since women have begun to serve in local government, and women note that they receive more respect now that they occupy positions of local authority.⁴⁵ Further, their participation and greater visibility in politics can generate self-confidence, enabling them to assert themselves in local decision making. Women in Uganda, for instance, took on projects—such as managing a community health clinic and establishing and running a market—that they had never before attempted.⁴⁶

The implications of women's representation—or lack of representation—at the local level are significant, too, in terms of the sustainability of women's leadership. When women serve in local government, they gain experience and exposure that can allow them to move into leadership at the national level. Increasing the number of women at the local level thus grooms the "next generation" of national leaders. Women develop constituencies and, if effective in office, records on which to base future campaigns. This in turn improves the sustainability of women's leadership, particularly in countries where quotas are temporary measures.

"Women naturally are more sensitive to issues related to the welfare of the society. When we have many women leaders, the welfare of our country will be improved."

Part Two: Women in the 2006 Local Elections in Rwanda

Eight separate elections were held in Rwanda in February and March 2006 to fill seats in local administrative structures: cells, sectors, and districts.

A variety of election methods were employed. At the smallest administrative unit, the local cell, there was not a secret ballot; instead, the electorate was asked to stand in line behind the candidate of their choice. Balloting was secret at the district level. Each voter received three ballots—one for general candidates, one for women, and one for youth. This “triple balloting” method, described in greater detail below, was designed to ensure the election of women and youth to district councils.

This report focuses on women’s representation at the district level, as the districts are theoretically the new seats of decentralized power in Rwanda. Staff of The Initiative for Inclusive Security observed the 2006 local elections, but the analysis offered here is concerned with the participation of women candidates; it is not an official election monitoring report. While this paper raises some of the problems reported during the 2006 process, especially as they relate to women candidates, it is not a comprehensive evaluation of Rwanda’s local elections.

TABLE 1: **Local Election Dates 2006**

Date	Election
February 6	Election of the Cell Executive Committees
February 10, 15, 17	Election of the National Youth Council Executive Committee
February 10	Election of the National Women’s Council Executive Committee
February 11	Election of the Sector Councils Election of the 30 percent women to the Sector Councils
February 20	Election of the District Councils Election of the Kigali City Council
February 28	Election of the District Executive Committees (Mayor and 2 Vice Mayors)
March 2	Election of the Kigali City Council Executive Committee
March 4	Election of the Kigali City Council Executive Committee (continued)



Voting at the local cell level was not conducted by secret ballot. Pictured here is a candidate standing on the bench, and voters in line behind him to have their votes counted. Photo credit: Elizabeth Powley

Preparing for Elections in the Midst of Decentralization

In the months and weeks preceding local elections, there was confusion about when voting would actually occur. A simultaneous re-districting process, designed to implement Rwanda's decentralization plans, compounded the problems raised by a lack of information about the elections. Just a few weeks before the elections, Rwanda's administrative map was re-drawn, and the number of administrative units was significantly reduced (see Table 2).

Rwanda's major decentralization plan was part of its national strategy to promote good governance and reduce poverty.^a The plan to devolve power to the local level included downsizing its bureaucracy, reducing expenditures, and improving the delivery of services. Toward this end, Rwanda conducted administrative reforms in early 2006. The number of administrative units was reduced significantly—for example, from 106 to 30 districts (see Table 2). This approach, which has received significant support from international development partners, was designed to reduce waste and create a system with a manageable number of units that could credibly deliver government services. The re-districting was implemented in January 2006.

Consequently, the 2006 elections had to accommodate administrative structures established only weeks earlier. This left little time to inform the population about the new system, its new administrative boundaries, and even the location of polling stations. Voting is compulsory in Rwanda and citizens can be penalized for non-participation, yet there was marked confusion leading up to the elections about where voters should report, and when the various elections would take place.

Because of the violence that accompanied Rwanda's first attempts at multi-partyism in the early 1990s, political parties are now barred from operating at the local level. This policy, designed to prevent "divisionist politics" and reduce the risk of ethnic radicalism, significantly curtails political life. Candidates for local election in Rwanda must campaign as individuals, not as represen-

tatives of political parties. Also as a precaution against political violence, Rwanda has deliberately short campaign periods. Candidates sometimes only have a few days to announce their candidacy and campaign for office. Critics charge that the practice is used to keep opposition parties—those other than the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)—from mobilizing candidates or mounting effective campaigns, while proponents claim that it is a necessary conflict prevention tool. Regardless, the policy has the practical effect of inhibiting planning and coordination.

In this context, the lack of information and confusion created by re-districting was particularly onerous, as made evident during interviews with potential women candidates in December 2005, less than two months before the elections were held:

I have no idea [what the criteria are to be a candidate in the local election].⁴⁷

We were told that the new election law is not yet out, but they promised us to be informed as soon as possible the exact dates for the elections.⁴⁸

As [far as] I know, elections will be organized in March next year, but there are some rumors that they will be done in January.⁴⁹

I heard that [the elections] will be held on March 6, 2006. For registration, even though the law is not yet out, I think it will be like in the last elections: [You submit] your résumé, a letter asking to be a candidate, and then you wait for approval.⁵⁰

The elections are supposed to be held early next year, but the new election law is still in parliament.⁵¹

Such lack of information about the elections or about candidate registration regulations disproportionately affects women. In Rwanda, where most of the population survives on subsistence agriculture, daily life is characterized by sex-specific work and sex-specific socialization. Women have less access to the public spaces and communication technologies, such as radios, and less

^a See, for example, Rwanda's framework for development entitled "Vision 2020," or its Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy for more information. Both are available at: <http://www.gov.rw/>.

TABLE 2: **Reduction in Numbers of Local Administrative Structures**

	December 2005	January 2006
Number of Provinces/Regions	12 provinces + city of Kigali	4 regions + city of Kigali
Number of Districts	106	30
Number of Sectors	1,536	416
Number of Cells	9,135	2,148

time participate in meetings or civic activities. Martine, a 58-year-old widow with four children in the former Kigali-Ngali province, noted:

I think ignorance is a major constraint to women's participation in leadership. It is very hard for women to be involved [in politics], since most of us don't have access to information. It is very rare to see a woman walking in the street listening to news as men do. [Taken] together with other [obstacles] like culture, some religious teachings, and the role of women in our society as a "mother," all of these things [prevent] many of us [from being] involved in elections and leadership.

"It is very hard for women to be involved [in politics], since most of us don't have access to information. It is very rare to see a woman walking in the street listening to news as men do."

mayor and two vice mayors (the vice mayor for administration and finance and the vice mayor for social affairs, including health).

In a more vigorous move, a "triple balloting" system was used to guarantee seats for women candidates in 2006. With slight modifications designed to increase the percentage of women elected, this was similar to the system used in 2001. At the sector level, each voter received three ballots and selected one candidate from each ballot. The first ballot was for the general candidate, frequently—but not necessarily—a man. The second ballot was for the woman candidate,

Fulfilling the Mandate, Missing an Opportunity

In 2001, 27 percent of those elected to the district councils were women, but their participation in the executive committees at the district level was limited. Women accounted for only five out of 106 district mayors, or 4.7 percent.⁵² The majority of women served as one of three vice mayors, usually as the vice mayor for gender.

In 2006, the government committed to implementing the constitutional mandate of 30 percent women in local-level governance. The number of vice mayors per district was also reduced, from three to two. The position of vice mayor for gender was eliminated, and the portfolio for gender was included within the responsibilities of the vice mayor for social affairs. The executive committee of each district therefore comprises one



Sample women's ballot. All voters had to select at least one woman. Photo credit: Elizabeth Powley

TABLE 3: **Composition of the District Councils**

District Elections 2001	District Elections 2006
106 districts	30 districts
5 women mayors (4.7 percent)	2 women mayors (6 percent) ^a
Executive councils = 1 mayor, 3 vice mayors	Executive councils = 1 mayor, 2 vice mayors
Vice mayors for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • administration, finance, economic development • youth and culture • gender 	Vice mayors for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • administration and finance • social affairs
27 percent of executive councils are women	33.3 percent of executive councils are women

^a Two women mayors were elected in 2006. At the time of writing, September 2007, one had resigned but not yet been replaced.

and the third ballot was for youth. Through a subsequent indirect election, a district council was chosen from candidates who won at the sector level. From that group, the executive committee was chosen.

Women achieved 33.3 percent of posts in the district executive committees nationwide. The city of Kigali, though administratively more comparable to Rwanda's four regions, not its 30 districts, held elections at the same time as the districts. Women were elected to 66.6 percent of the city's executive committee.

In some ways, the 2006 local elections resulted in important gains for women. On executive councils, the percentage of women increased from 27 to 33.3 percent, bringing the local level in line with the constitutional requirement of "at least 30 percent." The majority of women in district government are serving as "vice mayor for social affairs." That post, however, has been consolidated since 2001 to include gender, youth, culture, and health. This is a significant increase in responsibility from the 2001 system, which saw many women slotted into the post of "vice mayor for gender."

Furthermore, the reduction in the number of districts from 106 to 30, combined with the decentralization program, increased the authority of district leadership, including the women.

Despite these gains, a critique of the quota's implementation is necessary. Title one, chapter two, article nine of the 2003 constitution declares, "The State of Rwanda commits itself to ... equality of all Rwandans and between women and men reflected by ensuring that women are granted at least 30 percent of posts in decision-making organs."⁵³ Yet the definition of "decision-making organs" is ambiguous. Interpretation of the constitution, and a definition of the decision-making organ at the district level, was left to the 2006 election law. This was a missed opportunity for women. The law provided for women's representation in at least 30 percent of the positions in the district executive committees, not 30 percent of mayoral posts. Thus, while Rwanda technically fulfilled its constitutional quota, because women are more than 30 percent of the district executive councils, women are a paltry six percent of chief executives.

Interpretation of the constitution, and a definition of the decision-making organ at the district level, was left to the 2006 election law.

Part Three: Capacity Building to Address Persistent Barriers to Women's Participation as Candidates

Despite the quota and Rwandan women's relative success in attaining political representation, women point to numerous barriers to their participation as candidates in local elections. In addition to the confusing context of re-districting and the lack of information about the elections, described above, women faced additional challenges. To address these obstacles, The Initiative for Inclusive Security partnered with the Rwandan Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA) and the National Women's Council to deliver campaign training to potential women candidates in advance of the 2006 elections. This training helped prepare female candidates by providing female role models from parliament and concrete skills building that added to women's sense of competence and confidence. The capacity building program complemented the quota in that it helped to improve both the performance and number of women candidates in the local election.

Obstacles for Women Candidates

Research demonstrates that the largest obstacles to women's participation in the local elections are lack of self-confidence and prevailing cultural and social attitudes, problems that are often interlinked. A vice mayor for gender in a district in Butare summarized the problem as follows: "[One obstacle is] self-confidence. Women always consider themselves inferior to men, and this came as a result of some cultural beliefs that women were created to be wives and take care of children."⁵⁴

Certain cultural values persist that encourage women to be subordinate to men. Rwandan researchers have found that, while it may be true that "within the Rwandan culture [generally], there are certain tendencies or traits that are not conducive to interpersonal communication and free and open debate," these constraints are particularly burdensome for women.⁵⁶ Many women, particularly in rural areas, are not accustomed to speaking publicly or in the company of men. Young girls are still taught that it is virtuous to speak softly or not to speak at all, particularly in public spaces. Cultural expectations also dictate that even when educated or employed, women continue to shoulder traditional family duties of

caring for children, performing daily household chores, and fulfilling time-consuming social expectations.

Although there has been significant progress in Rwanda in recent years, women continue to experience repression as a result of persistent, discriminatory traditions perpetuated by men and women.⁵⁷ Polygamy, for example, remains a problem across the country, particularly in the northern region. This custom contributes to increased poverty levels, family tensions, and women and children's vulnerability.

Closely related to lack of self-confidence and cultural norms is the level of support a woman receives from her family, specifically the men in her life. In the words of one participant: "What women need, first of all, [is] to

be supported during campaigns by our families and society in general."⁵⁸ Unfortunately, this support is not always forthcoming. According to anecdotal evidence provided by women leaders, the husbands of successful women often are challenged by their wives' roles.⁵⁹ This feeling can lead to tensions and even violence in the family as women advance in public life. Because participation in local politics requires time away from the home and a belief that one is capable of contributing to the society at

large, women need their families, and especially the men in their lives, to understand and support the leadership roles they can play. Participants from around Rwanda highlighted this concern during the training program:

Married women need support from their husbands. And their children need to understand them, [because] they will not be around [if they have] leadership duties. From the society we need them to get over some wrong beliefs regarding women. Our society needs to give us a chance to prove that women are as capable as men in leadership.⁶⁰

Finally, structural barriers continue to limit women's ability to stand as candidates. The literacy rate for men is estimated at 71.4 percent; for women it is 59.8 percent.⁶¹ Twenty-five percent of women have never attended school, in contrast with only 17 percent of men.⁶² These disparities are even more dramatic in rural areas, where

Most Commonly Cited Barriers to Women's Participation as Candidates⁵⁵

- 1 Lack of self-confidence or an "inferiority complex" that prevents even qualified women from putting their names forward unless asked or invited by others
- 2 Prevailing cultural beliefs and traditional attitudes
- 3 Little information about election preparations and procedures
- 4 Absence of programs or "special attention" directed at grassroots women to encourage their candidacy
- 5 Weak support from men and families, or lack of cooperation between women and men that would allow women to participate in local decision-making positions
- 6 Illiteracy and lack of education
- 7 Poverty and the challenge of daily survival
- 8 The burden of family responsibilities and other time constraints
- 9 Poor access to sources of information, such as the media or information technology
- 10 Incomplete information on national policies and programs (e.g., the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Millennium Development Goals, and the government's "Vision 2020" plan)

the majority of Rwandan women live. Rural women's overburdened lifestyles and lack of access to income hampers their progress and keeps them entrenched in poverty. One participant describes the interplay of impediments to women's participation as political candidates as follows: "When one is poor, there is this feeling of lacking self-esteem. And poverty also forces women not to be involved in anything else apart from working for their household."⁶³

Cultural, social, and economic barriers make it extremely difficult for women to enter politics, particularly at the local level, where the forces of tradition are the strongest. A gender-sensitive constitution and favorable legislation are not enough. If the burdens on women are not reduced, they will not find the time or opportunity to engage in local politics. While women activists push for increased political representation, they are cognizant of the reality that it is difficult to recruit women candidates. The training program described below addressed the challenges that women face and the difficulties in recruiting candidates. It helped to insure that the demand created by the quota was met by an increased supply of trained and competent women candidates.

Training Curriculum and Delivery

While structural barriers require long-term, systemic solutions, immediate measures can be taken to address many of the challenges faced by women. Recognizing the need to increase women's participation in local government, The Initiative for Inclusive Security partnered with the Rwandan Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA) and the National Women's Council in late 2005 to deliver a training program for potential women candidates in the upcoming local elections.^b Between December 10 and 28, 2005, RALGA staff provided training on civic education and campaign strategies in all 12 of Rwanda's provinces.^c Training was conducted in anticipation of the elections, though dates were not set by law or announced until the end of January 2006. Elections were held in February and March of that year.

^b At the time of the training program, the election law was not final, and the date for elections had not been set. Subsequently, local-level elections were scheduled to begin in February 2006.

^c At the time, there were 12 provinces in Rwanda. Subsequently, but before the elections, the provinces were dissolved and replaced by four regions.



*Member of Parliament Marie Claire Ingabire (center) speaks to training participants about her life experience and her political career.
Photo credit: Elvis Gakuba*

The Initiative for Inclusive Security facilitated the contributions of women parliamentarians, who spoke about their own motivations for participating in electoral politics and the need for women's participation in decision making at all levels. The presence of these senior-level politicians as role models was a significant component of the leadership training curriculum. Valerie Nyirahabineza, the minister for gender and family promotion in the Office of the Prime Minister, joined the program in at least two provinces. Staff of The Initiative for Inclusive Security conducted in-depth interviews with participants in six of the 12 provinces (Butare, Kigali-Ngali, Byumba, Ruhengeri, Gisenyi, and Kibungo) before and after the training.^d Findings from these interviews contributed to a model for preparing women to run for local office; features include a combination of technical skills training and the involvement of role models.

As the primary partner, RALGA joined The Initiative for Inclusive Security in developing the training curriculum and implementing the project. The curriculum was written and delivered in the local language, Kinyarwanda, and included modules on civic education, campaign strategies, leadership training, and women's representation and policy priorities.

RALGA worked with the National Women's Council to combine this training with the Women's Councils annual meetings throughout the country. The participants included more than 2,300 women from all provinces. By coordinating with the National Women's Council, The Initiative for Inclusive Security and RALGA were able to share costs and reach a wider group of participants. Importantly, the women participants were community leaders, having been self-selected for participation in the National Women's Council. Thus, they were able to return to their communities and share the information and training techniques with others in their districts.

^d Interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda; translation was provided by Elvis Gakuba.

About the Training Partners

Based in Kigali, the **Initiative for Inclusive Security's Rwanda Project** was designed to demonstrate how women's leadership in a post-conflict country can be pivotal for the development and stabilization of society. The project, which was active in Rwanda from 2005 to 2007, documented the contributions of women leaders. For more information, visit www.InclusiveSecurity.org.

The **Rwandan Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA)** is a non-governmental, nonprofit membership organization for local officials. Its mission is to help build "efficient, effective, transparent, and accountable local government systems" in Rwanda. For more information, visit www.ralga.org.rw.

The **National Women's Council** is a quasi-governmental system of local councils that represent women's concerns at every administrative level. The 30 percent quota in Rwanda's parliament is filled from the membership of the National Women's Council; and its highly organized structure makes it an important vehicle for ensuring women's involvement in decentralization.

Each training workshop lasted a full day. The program began with a panel discussion and presentations. Following was a facilitated discussion, led by RALGA staff, which provided an opportunity for participants to exchange views in small groups and with the plenary of participants. The participation of women parliamentarians in each session in each province was an important element of the program. These senior, national-level figures spoke candidly with participants about their own decisions to run for political office, their backgrounds before entering politics, the challenges of managing a public career and a family life, and how they gained the self-confidence to be a leader.

Training Topics and Technical Skills

The civic education component of the training program included the following topics:

- obstacles to women's participation, and strategies for overcoming them;
- strengths of women's leadership, and how to build on them in campaigns;
- candidate criteria (e.g., age and education level) at each administrative level;
- laws and regulations related to campaigning; and
- decentralization, re-districting, and its impact on the campaigns.

The program focused on enhancing the following technical skills:

- preparing a plan of action or campaign platform;
- conducting an electoral campaign;
- managing conflicts during rallies and elections;
- advocating for one's candidacy;
- working with the media; and
- preparing a campaign budget.

Participants were encouraged to take the information and skills back to their communities and prepare grassroots women at the cell level for the upcoming elections.

Women Parliamentarians as Role Models

The Initiative for Inclusive Security's training was the only program during the campaign season that brought women parliamentarians to the grassroots level to encourage other women to run for local office. Participants commented repeatedly that modeling successful female leadership and providing visible, culturally appropriate examples of women was a critical component of the training program. The inclusion of role models was a form of mentoring for participants. Because Inclusive Security and RALGA worked with the women parliamentarians in advance, encouraging them to speak about their personal histories and their personal paths

TABLE 4: **Number of Potential Candidates Trained**

Province	Number Trained
Kigali Ngali	216
Kibuye	127
Gikongoro	216
Butare	243
Byumba	182
Gisenyi	238
Gitarama	237
Cyangugu	167
Ruhengeri	313
Kibungo	190
Umutara	111
Kigali City	88
TOTAL	2,328

to leadership, their presentations were candid and intimate. The all-woman environment allowed for a level of disclosure and honesty on the part of parliamentarians that provided a safe space for grassroots women to ask questions and share their own challenges. For example, parliamentarians fielded questions about how to discuss an interest in campaigning with one's husband.

Some of the MPs who participated have backgrounds similar to the trainees'. This comparison provided hope, inspiration, and an opportunity for participants to visualize themselves in leadership roles. The parliamentarians also offered practical insight into how they made decisions, gained the support of their families, and ran for office. As one participant remarked, "Women candidates need ideas; they need people who can help them with constructive ideas. When you have people who are willing to advise you and give you information that you need during a campaign period, these are crucial things for women in leadership."⁶⁴

The need for political role models is echoed in other contexts. A study of American women working as social justice activists within nonprofit organizations concludes that "one strategy for promoting women's political voice

is to hold up role models for women's political activism, in order to expand their sense of what is possible and appropriate for women's lives."⁶⁵ A study of women in local leadership positions in Colombia, Iraq, and Serbia found that "establishing support systems, mentorship programs, and exchange of experiences with other women in leadership" is important for building the confidence of women and encouraging them to seek leadership positions.⁶⁶

Assessment of the Training

The program sought to address obstacles that persist in spite of the 30 percent quota. Specifically, presentations by female role models and a curriculum of concrete skills building added to women's capability and sense of self-assurance, thereby addressing one of the primary barriers to their participation as candidates in local elections.

The training and civic education program opened doors for women participants. It provided information necessary to prepare for elections, skills building, and access to role models. Said one trainee, "The whole of the training was very interesting, and I have made up my mind to run as a sector coordinator. Though I don't have

academic qualifications, I have [learned today] that I have experience which is considered [in lieu of formal education].”⁶⁷

In the words of other participants:

[This training] was very interesting to me, [especially] the part about “Women and Leadership,” when we discussed the problems that women encounter in leadership. We shared information about the strengths of women [and] what can be done to increase women’s representation... We decided to go and share what we have learned here with other women back in our district(s).⁶⁸

Another thing that I learned is...to be realistic when I present my campaign platform to the electorate. I [won’t] promise them things that I know very well

that I cannot do while in office...The challenge ahead of us is to change the views of other women in rural areas...but with the knowledge we were given here [in the training], we will be able to convince other women [to run for office].⁶⁹

“I am challenged by everything that we learned today. I am more determined to stand for election than ever before... My thinking was transformed... with the strategies and the advice we were given this morning, I am more confident and know now what to do.”

I am challenged by everything that we learned today. I am more determined to stand for election than ever before and I am going back in my sector to mobilize other women so that in the coming elections, women in our sector will not be not less than 30 percent...My thinking was transformed...with the strategies and the advice we were given this morning, I am more confident and know now what to do.⁷⁰

The training program described above was not the only attempt to reach potential women candidates. Other institutions, such as the Ministry



Training participants in Butare Province. The woman in the center is practicing public speaking techniques. Photo credit: Elvis Gakuba

of Gender and Family Promotion in the Office of the Prime Minister and the National Election Commission, convened partner organizations and NGOs and supported limited programming to encourage women candidates in 2006. The Initiative for Inclusive Security's training program was, however, the only program that linked women parliamentarians and potential women candidates at the local level. And significantly, The Ini-

tiative for Inclusive Security worked with RALGA and the National Women's Council to design a training program *before* the official election dates were announced. In the final assessment, this was a critical decision. If the program had not anticipated the elections by two months, there would not have been time to mobilize women nationwide or guarantee the participation of women parliamentarians and other high-level officials.

Conclusion

This paper has briefly described Rwanda's decentralization efforts in the context of the 2006 local elections and offered a critique of the implementation of the 30 percent quota. It has also examined questions of women and local government, using Rwanda as an example, in order to highlight the barriers to women's participation and explore how those can be overcome.

Between 2001 and 2006, women's participation in district level government in Rwanda rose to over 30 percent. Women's representation at the level of district mayor is, however, paltry in comparison. Only six percent of mayors are female, up only slightly since 2001. This data provides a cautionary lesson about quotas. Quotas are critical for increasing women's representation in government; but equally important is the interpretation of those quotas. Rwandan election law interpreted the constitution to mean that women must make up 30 percent of district executive committees, not 30 percent of district mayors. Viewed in this light, Rwanda's success implementing its quota in the 2006 election is less dramatic.

Further complicating this critique are local rules, attitudes, and customs that constitute significant and specific barriers to women's participation in local government. Traditional understandings of authority and power, and resistance to women's engagement, are often stronger at the local level than they are among the educated elite at the national level. Beyond the guarantee of quotas, women at the local level need training and programs designed to build their self-confidence, make them aware of election law and regulations, and provide them with technical skills so that they can be effective candidates.

It was precisely this type of training that The Initiative for Inclusive Security, in cooperation with local partner organizations, delivered in December 2005. The program, which combined civic education and skills building sessions with the use of national leaders as role models, was implemented in all of Rwanda's 12 provinces and reached more than 2,300 potential female candidates. Though it is not possible to establish a direct, causal link between this training program and the increase in women candidates and elected women councilors, participants testified to its importance in their own decision-making, and this is informative. In interviews, many participants indicated that they would not have considered running for office without such training and mentoring. The participation of parliamentarians and other high-level female officials was identified as a key component in the training. The successful use of role models was a critical complement to other training methods, and should inform the design of future programs.

Rwanda offers an important example to other post-conflict and developing countries with regard to decentralization and democratization efforts. While women face challenges entering the political realm even when quotas are in place, there are concrete and replicable programs that can bolster self-confidence and provide the technical skills they need to effectively participate in elections and in local government. By linking capacity building programs to quotas, both the quality of the women candidates, as well as their overall number, are increased.

Appendix 1: Map of Rwanda



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- 70 Donatta, married women, a farmer with 10 children, Kigali-Ngali province.

