

Strengthening Governance:
The Role of Women in Rwanda's Transition

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WOMEN WAGING PEACE is a program of Hunt Alternatives Fund that advocates for the full participation of women in formal and informal peace processes around the world.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Wars and internal conflicts do not end simply with the signing of peace agreements. To avoid a resurgence of violence, it is necessary to develop and support measures for strengthening the governance, security, justice, and socioeconomic capacities of a state. This is a complex task in any society, but daunting in post-conflict situations. While the international community can provide assistance and valuable resources, the local population, which has no “exit strategy,” has the greatest commitment to building sustainable peace. It is therefore essential to draw on the assets, experiences, and dedication at the local level and among all sectors of society. One sector often overlooked and underestimated is women. In most post-conflict societies women are more than 50 percent of the population and are actively engaged in peace building while addressing the basic survival needs of their families and communities. Yet they are often portrayed as passive victims, and little regard is given to their actual and potential roles in fostering security.

In October 2000, for the first time in its history, the United Nations Security Council acknowledged that women have a key role in promoting international stability by passing Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. It called on all parties to ensure women’s participation in peace processes, from the prevention of conflict to negotiations and post-war reconstruction. The Women Waging Peace Policy Commission was established to examine peace processes with a particular focus on the contributions of women. ***“Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda’s Transition”* is one of three field-based case studies that examine women’s contributions to post-conflict governance.**

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings

- Following parliamentary elections in 2003, women hold nearly 50 percent of seats in Rwanda's new bicameral parliament.
- During the post-genocide transition years, innovative mechanisms were created that enabled women's participation in leadership structures at all levels.
- At national and grassroots levels, Rwandan women have been at the forefront of post-genocide recovery and reconciliation.
- Women in government have developed models for working across party and ethnic lines and strengthening partnerships with civil society.

Recommendations

1. While the international community must continue to pressure Rwanda to become more democratic, it must also acknowledge the progress made regarding women's inclusion, and allocate resources to further these efforts. The political space that has been opened must not be allowed to collapse.
 - The new structures must be funded.
 - Members of the women's councils should be salaried (similar to members of the general councils).
 - Training should be provided to strengthen women's skills in leadership and governance.
2. Program designers in multilateral and bilateral aid organizations should draw on Rwanda's new structures as models for the inclusion of women in other post-conflict societies.
3. The presence, participation, and progress of women in governance structures should be a key indicator by which the international community measures good governance and democratization processes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Rwanda's parliamentary elections in September 2003 officially ended a nine-year period of post-genocide transition. While the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) dominated the elections as expected and won a large majority of seats in the newly formed bicameral legislature, the political landscape was altered dramatically: nearly 50 percent of new representatives are women. This statistic places Rwanda among only a few nations in the world with such strong representation of women in its parliament.

The legacy of the 1994 genocide remains a central feature of Rwanda's political and social landscape, but new institutions and elections have ushered in a more promising era. Decentralization, seen as pivotal to the dismantling of an authoritarian state, has begun. While major obstacles to democracy remain, most visibly demonstrated during the recent elections when there were concerns raised about the repression of opposition parties, the government has been progressive in its initiatives to include in the political process previously excluded sectors of society, notably women and youth. The results of the September election were dramatic: women compose 49 percent of the lower house (Chamber of Deputies). In the upper house (Senate), 30 percent (6 out of 20) of appointed members are women.

Throughout the transition years, women in parliament, civil society, and government created cross-sectoral initiatives and played a significant role in post-conflict governance. Their participation is increasingly recognized as critical to the long-term security and stability of the country. Amid the complexity that characterizes Rwanda today, these are important developments. If supported, women could be the key to democratization and sustainable peace.

The 1994 Genocide and Beyond

When the genocide ended and the RPF helped form the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 1994, it was faced with a population that was 70 percent women and girls. While some women had been involved in perpetrating the violence (they are 2.3 percent of genocide suspects), the vast majority witnessed the bloodshed and were victims of rape, displacement, and trauma. Yet in the aftermath, they immediately assumed multiple roles as heads of household, community leaders, and financial providers, meeting

the needs of devastated families and society more broadly. They buried the dead, built shelters, and in a country with fewer than ten million people, found homes for nearly 500,000 orphans. Today women are 54 percent of the adult population and a majority of working adults. They head 35 percent of households, are responsible for raising the next generation, and produce the majority of this largely rural nation's agricultural output.

Believing that the genocide was orchestrated by an authoritarian and centralized state, leaders of the GNU considered democratization and decentralization vital to reconciliation efforts and the prevention of future violence. In particular, they recognized the importance of providing space in decision-making processes for previously excluded groups—such as women, whom the public perceived as being especially victimized, more innocent of the genocide, and generally more trustworthy. Moreover, the RPF's leadership had witnessed women's contributions to development in Uganda and understood that they were critical to South Africa's post-apartheid transition. Within its own ranks, too, women played a significant role in the movement's success. Combined, these factors ensured that gender sensitivity in policymaking, as well as a belief in the need to include women in the political arena, became hallmarks of the RPF-led government program for post-genocide recovery and reconstruction.

For many in the international community, particularly in light of the August 2003 presidential elections and September 2003 parliamentary elections, the government's rhetoric of democratization has been eclipsed by the reality of a predominantly one-party system. But the GNU's policies on decentralization have included highly innovative structures that have already broadened public involvement in decision making at the local level. Women's participation, especially, has increased significantly.

In the 1999 elections for cell-level (local) councils, women won 13.7 percent of the seats. Two years later, they won 27 percent of the seats in the sector and district elections. The new constitution, ratified in May 2003, calls for a minimum of 30 percent women in all decision-making posts and sets aside 30 percent of seats in the Chamber of Deputies (24 out of 80) for women emerging from a women-only voting system.

Many women also competed with men on the regular ballot and 15 were elected to parliament last month, representing their political parties and bringing the total in the Chamber of Deputies to 49 percent.

Structures and initiatives that the Rwandans developed include:

1. *A parallel system of women's councils and women-only elections guaranteeing a women's mandate for all elected bodies*

Women's councils are grassroots structures, elected at the cell level by women only and at each successive administrative level by indirect election. The head of the women's council holds a reserved seat on the general local council, ensuring official representation of women's concerns and providing a link between the two systems. It is from this system that 24 seats are retained for women out of 80 total seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

2. *A triple balloting system guaranteeing the election of women to a percentage of seats at the sector and district levels*

In these elections, each voter completes three ballots at the sector level: a general ballot, a women's ballot, and a youth ballot. Through a subsequent indirect election much like an electoral college, a district council is chosen, guaranteeing that women are at least 20 percent of councilors at that level.

3. *The Ministry for Gender and Women in Development and gender posts within other government and ministerial structures, at all levels*

The ministry and the administrative positions have a mandate to address issues relating to women's interests and to ensure that all policies are sensitive to the potentially differing needs and conditions of women and men.

The women-only councils (cell level), together with the triple balloting system (sector level), were instrumental in providing women with the opportunity to gain experience and confidence in public and political arenas, that ultimately led to their success in the parliamentary elections.

Promoting Good Governance: Women's Contributions

Women members of the RPF have had a key role in shaping decisions due to the degree of influence their party has had in government. Nonetheless, with the establishment of inclusive policies and the three innovative structures, other women are also emerging as leaders.

Women's contributions to the political system include:

- influencing policies regarding **decentralization and related structures** so that previously marginalized sectors (women and youth) are now included and gender sensitivity is integrated at all levels of government;
- initiating and implementing **national and community-based reconciliation efforts** that reach into the grassroots, laying the foundations for forgiveness and acceptance of returnees and prisoners implicated in the genocide;
- convening consultative meetings and participating in **drafting the new national constitution**;
- creating the only tripartite **partnership among civil society and executive and legislative bodies**—a coordinating mechanism to ensure that new legislation reflects the needs of women and that basic services are provided to communities countrywide; and
- forming the first **cross-party caucus in parliament**, which works effectively on issues such as land rights and food security in a political environment that remains tense.

Conclusion

Rwanda is a nascent democracy facing enormous challenges related to mass poverty and illiteracy, an overburdened justice system, internal displacement, insecurity, widespread HIV/AIDS, and deep-rooted trauma borne of genocide. The government's involvement in regional conflicts, checkered record on human rights, and censorship of dissenting parties lead many to be skeptical of its commitment to genuine democracy.

Notwithstanding these concerns, structures designed to include women have opened avenues for greater public participation in local and national governance. As Rwanda enters a new stage in its transformation, the leadership that women have shown must not be

underestimated, despite the obstacles they continue to face. They have entered the political sphere in unprecedented numbers and in unprecedented ways. They have initiated policies and programs addressing many of the root causes and effects of the genocide.

It will take time and commitment nationally and internationally, however, to see the fruits of these measures. Local councils are under-resourced, and youth and women's councils work on a voluntary basis, with no funds to develop their work or strengthen their skills. Despite these shortcomings, there has been tremendous change in the public sphere regarding women. At all levels throughout the country, few doubt that women's participation in governance is a pillar of longer-term democratization and sustainable peace. Internationally, this should be recognized, encouraged, and supported.

INTRODUCTION

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda, perpetrated by Hutu extremists against the Tutsi minority and moderate Hutus, killed an estimated 800,000 people (one-tenth of the population), traumatized survivors, and destroyed the country's infrastructure.

Lasting approximately 100 days, the slaughter ended in July 1994 when the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)^a, which had been engaged in a four-year civil war with the Hutu-dominated regime of President Juvenal Habyarimana, secured a military victory. Once an opposition movement and guerilla army, the RPF is now a predominately (but not exclusively) Tutsi political party. It remains in power today, presiding over the country's transitional government until elections in September 2003 formally end that period.

In its efforts to rebuild Rwanda, the RPF-led government has publicly committed itself to a platform of unity and reconciliation. It has identified Rwanda's history of exclusionary and undemocratic governance as a major cause of the genocide and, in attempting to prevent future violence, has emphasized inclusive democracy, decentralization, reconciliation, and poverty reduction as critical components of good governance.¹

Democracy in Rwanda faces many challenges. Among them are Rwanda's prolonged involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's civil war, accusations of human rights abuses at home, the reintegration of accused *genocidaires*, and the need to foster political debate without a return to the extremism of the early 1990s. But on the key question of inclusivity, Rwanda's government has taken unprecedented steps to increase the participation of women and young people in governance. Joseph Sebarenzi, former speaker of the Rwandan Parliament who is now in exile, acknowledges, despite his belief that Rwanda has a "poor record in democracy," that "gender representation in Rwanda is an undeniable fact and the government should be credited for it."²

In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, women and girls constituted 70 percent of the population.³ Acknowledging the presence, needs, and potential role of this majority population, the government determined that women must be central to the process of governing, reconciling, and rebuilding the country. A number of women held critical positions within the ranks of the RPF. Such women have been appointed to strategic posts in the transitional government; more significantly, their presence has contributed to progressive gender policies within the administration. Despite the uncertainty of upcoming parliamentary elections and the end of Rwanda's transitional period, Rwandan women have demonstrated tremendous resilience and willingness to lead their country to a better future.

This report is in two parts. The first provides an historical overview of Rwanda, highlighting women's participation in the public arena prior to the 1994 genocide. It also includes a brief examination of the genocide's impact on women and of what women did during that period. Part two focuses on the post-genocide period, exploring both the rationale for making gender considerations central to the struggle for peace and better governance, and the impact of such policies. It describes three structures the Rwandan government put in place to encourage women's participation in governance and evaluates their effectiveness as models. Finally, this report considers several key components of good governance—policy formulation, national reconciliation efforts, the national constitution, parliamentary and legislative systems, and the involvement of civil society—and how women have initiated, participated in, and advanced them.

Outlined briefly here are the rationale for this study, underlying assumptions, an explanation of methodology, and definitions of key terms.

^a The military wing of the RPF was called the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA). This paper adopts the common usage of referring to both the military and political wings as the RPF.

Rationale

There is a strong rationale for the focus on Rwanda as a case study in women's contributions to post-conflict governance. First, as noted elsewhere,^b because of the dramatic demographic shift and social upheaval that resulted from the genocide, Rwandan women assumed non-traditional roles, including leadership positions in the public sector. While there have been significant and important analyses of the **impact** of the genocide on Rwandan women, their **agency** has not been fully examined. It is crucial to balance our understanding of the effects of war on women with an understanding of their contributions to peace. Second, the Rwandan government made women's inclusion a hallmark of its program for post-genocide recovery and reconstruction.⁴ This approach is novel in both intent and scope; it deserves study particularly because it contradicts the notion that the inclusion of women is solely a "Western" value imposed upon developing countries. Third, no study has yet comprehensively documented the formal structures that Rwanda instituted to encourage women's inclusion or evaluated their effectiveness. Fourth and finally, this assessment of women's contributions to governance for peace is timely. As a number of conflicts in Africa and elsewhere move toward negotiated settlement, the international community and indigenous actors need models for post-conflict governance. While there is increasing awareness of the need to include women in decision making and of the contributions they can make, there are few examples or guidelines from which to draw.

Assumptions

This study rests upon several assumptions. Chief among them is the notion that democratic processes and participatory governance are essential for **sustainable** peace. Further, it presupposes that democracy is improved by the inclusion of all voices in society—specifically, those of both women and men.

This study does not assume that women are more peaceful by nature than men or that their mere presence guarantees democratic governance.^c It argues that, because of their different life experiences, women often bring new perspectives and processes to the task of building peace in the aftermath of conflict. Empirical evidence suggests that women experience conflict differently from men, both as casualties and caretakers.⁵ Because of their experiences in war and their increased responsibilities in the aftermath, women have an interest in transforming their societies from conflict to peace and are thus fundamental stakeholders in the peace process. They should therefore be recognized as active agents rather than passive victims in such processes, including post-conflict governance. As mothers, wives, and sisters of combatants, and as individuals with powerful community networks, women are essential to rebuilding society. To exclude their voices is not only undemocratic—it ultimately undermines the peace.

Research Methodology

This study is the result of an extensive literature survey on issues of women in democracy and governance in general, and Rwanda in particular, including an analysis of relevant academic literature, reports, and government publications. Primary research was conducted during multi-week field trips in 2002 and 2003. In-depth interviews were also conducted in the US and UK. In all, more than 50 interviews were conducted with Rwandan and international scholars, representatives of the international community, national-level government officials, representatives of Rwandan civil society, and local women leaders. These interviews took place in Rwanda's capital, Kigali, as well as in several provinces (Butare, Gisenyi, Gitarama, and Kigali-Ngali). In addition to the semi-structured individual interviews, focus groups in Ruhengeri and Kibungo provinces were conducted by a local research team.

^b For descriptions of Rwandan women's non-traditional social and political roles in post-genocide Rwanda, see both Catharine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin, "Confronting the Aftermath of Conflict: Women's Organizations in Postgenocide Rwanda," *Women and Civil War: Impact, Organizations, and Action*, ed. Krishna Kumar (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001) and Heather Hamilton, "Rwanda's Women: The Key to Reconstruction," *The Future of the African Great Lakes Region* (Bradford, UK: The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, 2000), 19 May 2002 <<http://www.jha.ac/greatlakes/b001.htm>>.

^c In fact, women's active participation in the 1994 genocide is referenced below. Yet, it is important to note that women have not participated in such violence in the same numbers as men, or from equivalent positions of power.

This report focuses on national-level policies and leaders in order to understand and analyze Rwanda's priorities and planning for good governance, official policies vis-à-vis women and gender, and macro-level challenges. Although particular care was taken to ensure that other voices—particularly those of international actors and local women's NGOs—were included in this study, data collection focused on national policies and implementation programs. A more detailed assessment of the local impact of these policies, while important, was outside the scope of this work.

Methodological Note: Ethnicity in Rwanda

Ethnicity in Rwanda is highly politicized. Various estimates project that the current population is 85 percent Hutu, 14 percent Tutsi, and 1 percent Twa.⁶ Much has been written about the biological and geographical origins of these groups, and scholars have long debated whether they are best classified as separate races, tribes, or ethnic groups. The difficult nature of this question is illustrated by the fact that none of these classifications is entirely accurate and that no comfortable consensus exists about the appropriate term. This study will refer to the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa as ethnic groups while acknowledging the problematic nature of such terminology.

Today, many Rwandans are reluctant to identify themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic group. This is not surprising given the country's history of discrimination, exclusion, and ethnic violence. Mandatory identity cards, first issued by the Belgian colonial administration and perpetuated by post-independence governments until 1994, listed an individual's "ethnic." The classification on one's identity card determined access to education, jobs, and civil liberties. During the 1994 genocide, to carry an identity card marked "Tutsi" was to be targeted for death. In the aftermath, to be Hutu meant to be suspected of having perpetrated genocide or collaborated with *genocidaires*.

In the post-genocide period, the Government of National Unity (GNU) abolished identity cards that recorded ethnicity and instead emphasized the "unity" of all Rwandans.⁴ This achievement, however idealistic and forward-thinking its intent, masks real tensions, fears, and problems around ethnicity that still exist in Rwandan society. Observers concerned that the government is dominated by the Tutsi minority cite the refusal to discuss ethnicity or ethnic balance as deliberate obfuscation.

Though generalizations about physical appearance exist—Tutsi are supposedly taller, thinner, and lighter skinned than Hutu—there are enough exceptions to this "rule" of physiognomy to render it less than helpful. Instances of inter-marriage and children of mixed parentage also make it difficult to determine ethnic identity on the basis of physical features. Rwandans of all ethnicities speak the same language, share the same culture and religious beliefs, and give their children the same names. It

The establishment of peace is ... a process characterized by progress and setbacks, successes and failures.

is frequently difficult for Rwandans themselves, let alone outsiders, to distinguish between groups.

Despite these challenges, ethnic balance, such as is

possible in this polarized environment, was deliberately sought in the selection of interviewees. Out of respect for the privacy that many sources value, however, the ethnicity of individuals is not revealed here.

Definitions

Peace Processes

Just as scholars have identified the "lifecycle" of conflict,⁷ current thinking in the field identifies a lifecycle of peace. The establishment of peace is not a single event, but rather a process characterized by progress and setbacks, successes and failures. People who live in societies with protracted conflict and observers of peace processes are all too familiar with premature celebration of ceasefires and peace accords that are later violated. Even if a peace settlement holds, it requires massive logistical, financial, and psychological support if implementation is to be successful.

⁴ In her chapter of a forthcoming edited volume, Erin K. Baines examines with dexterity the intricate relationship between ethnicity and gender in Rwanda. She charges that the "GNU tends to mask ethnic and class differences among women in national discourses on gender equality and unity." See Erin K. Baines, "Les Femmes Aux Mille Bras: Building Peace in Rwanda," *Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping*, eds. Dyan Mazurana, Angela Raven-Roberts, and Jane Parpart (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming in 2003).

Perhaps the most realistic approach is to acknowledge that though negotiations are “the best-known stage in a process of peace,” as Anderlini et al. write in *Journeys Through Conflict: Narratives and Lessons*,

“[they] represent but one moment. Though essential, they nevertheless do not exhaust all the possibilities of actions or initiatives that such a process may require. For negotiations to take place, prenegotiations are necessary, be they formal or informal. For a political settlement to succeed, implementation of the provisions of an accord in the postnegotiation period is vital. In other words, it could be said that peace processes have three broad phases: preparation, transformation, and consolidation.”⁸

This study focuses on the post-conflict or consolidation phase of the process in Rwanda, specifically on issues of good governance.

Good Governance

Consolidation of the peace in a post-conflict setting is dependent on many factors, including what is referred to as “good governance.” The establishment of good governance is a lengthy process rather than a singular event. It typically includes efforts at democratization, the introduction of free and fair elections, participatory politics, the creation of an independent civil society, and respect for constitutionalism and the rule of law.^c

The Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project (PCR)^f identified “governance and participation” as one of four pillars^g of post-conflict reconstruction that move countries out of conflict toward sustainable peace and long-term development.⁹ The PCR framework identifies key components of governance that must be addressed by indigenous and international actors to assist the transition from violent conflict to normalization. They include national constituting processes, transitional governance, executive authority, legislative strengthening, local governance, transparency and

anti-corruption, independent media, and active civil society, as well as participation in elections and political parties.¹⁰

Such frameworks are useful to the multilateral and bilateral development agencies, humanitarian aid agencies, and national actors that promote democratic governance as key to the success of long-term development. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) focuses its interventions on the following components of good governance: legislatures, electoral systems and processes, justice and human rights, access to information, decentralization and local governance, public administration, and civil service reform.¹¹ The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) similarly promotes good governance as “a government’s ability to maintain social peace, guarantee law and order, promote or create conditions necessary for economic growth, and ensure a minimum level of social security.” This is characterized by “democracy (e.g., elections, human rights, and representation), [as well as] public accountability, responsiveness, transparency, and efficiency.”¹² The World Bank identifies six indicators of good governance that it uses “to help countries identify areas of weakness so that capacity building and assistance strategies are more effective.” Those indicators are voice and accountability, political stability and lack of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption.¹³ This study draws on such definitions and frameworks to establish women’s contributions in the context of accepted definitions of good governance.

Gender

The term “gender” refers to the socially constructed—as opposed to biologically determined—identities of men and women. Gender is not the same as “sex,” and gender differences are not the same as sex differences. For instance, the ability of women to bear children is a sex, or biologically determined, difference from men;

^c For a good description of the challenges and opportunities associated with democratization, see Timothy D. Sisk, “Democratization and Peacebuilding: Perils and Promise,” *Turbulent Peace: The Challenge of Managing International Conflict*, eds. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001).

^f The Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project is a joint initiative of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Association of the United States Army (AUSA).

^g The other three pillars identified in this framework are security, justice and reconciliation, and social and economic well-being.

that women, in many societies, are responsible for food preparation and household chores is a gender, or socially constructed, difference.

Gender roles are assigned to men and women in early socialization. They cut across public and private spheres; are specific to a given culture at a given time; are affected by other forms of differentiation such as race, ethnicity, and class; and can change in different socio-political and economic contexts within a society. World Bank literature notes that in any given society, gender shapes the definitions of acceptable responsibilities and functions for men and women in terms of “social and economic activities, access to resources, and decision-making authority.”¹⁴

In any gender analysis, two basic factors emerge for consideration. The first, gender mainstreaming, highlights the implications of policies and programs on men and women. This means that, in the construction of policies and programs, it is necessary to consider how implementation will affect men and women differently. As defined by UNDP, gender **mainstreaming** is “taking account of gender concerns in all policy, program, administrative and financial activities, and in organizational procedures, thereby contributing to a profound organizational transformation.”¹⁵ UNDP further notes that, “if gender mainstreaming is done effectively, the mainstream will be transformed into a process much closer to true democracy.”¹⁶

The second factor relates to gender **balance**. Men and women in decision-making positions can have a differential impact on policy and program development; thus, both men and women must be included in policy formulation. In order to integrate gender considerations comprehensively, mainstreaming and balance are both important.

This report is careful not to conflate the terms “gender” and “women.” It examines how gender considerations (mainstreaming and balance) affect governance and how the participation of women has contributed to good governance.

PART ONE: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The 1994 genocide pushed Rwanda onto the world stage, provoking much analysis and some soul-searching on the part of an international community that had been unable to prevent the violence and was, ultimately, unwilling to intervene to stop the killing.¹ Though not simply the result of “ancient hatreds” between the Hutu and Tutsi “tribes”¹⁷ as reported and repeated by many, the conflict in Rwanda predated the tragedy of 1994.

The Colonial Period

Rwanda became a German colony in 1897, but the Germans pursued a policy of indirect rule and oversaw a “light administrative implantation.”¹⁸ Their presence was limited and short-lived; a League of Nations mandate transferred possession of Rwanda to Belgium in 1919. The Belgian colonial administration, by comparison, was sizeable, harsh, and had a major impact on the structure of Rwandan society. Belgian authorities consolidated local power in the hands of Tutsi chiefs and privileged Tutsi over Hutu with regard to land rights, education, socioeconomic opportunity, and access to power.¹⁹ Most perniciously, the Belgians brought to Africa notions of race and “race science” and interpreted existing Rwandan social structures through that lens. Though distinctions between ethnic groups did exist in precolonial Rwanda, “there were variations among regions, and a fair amount of flexibility in social relations.”²⁰ The Belgians replaced what had been relatively fluid ethnic designations—Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa—with rigid classifications and inflexible institutions, such as ethnic identity cards.¹ Historian Gérard Prunier concludes that the impact of the Belgian colonial administration on ethnic relations in Rwanda was profound. “Although Rwanda was definitely not a land of peace and bucolic harmony before the arrival of the Europeans,” he writes, “there is no trace in its precolonial history of systematic violence between Tutsi and Hutu as such.”²¹

During the colonial period, Rwandan women did not have a voice in public affairs or the administration of the colony. However, within the royal family, a Tutsi institution that European authorities both tolerated and manipulated, the Queen Mother had a significant function. As protector of the heir to the throne and manager of the royal household, she played a “vital political role.” At least one Queen Mother—Kanjogera of the Abega clan, who ruled during the German period—was so powerful that she has been described as “the most important person in the kingdom.”²² Her authority was formidable, and her interventions—including a *coup d’état* that placed her son on the throne—were so notorious that the name “Kanjogera” has become synonymous with a woman who wields terrible power and is the real authority behind the public face of a male leader.²³ During the late twentieth century, the nickname “Kanjogera” was given to the wife of President Habyarimana. She was believed, along with her powerful family, to be the real force behind his leadership. It is important to note that the dominant image of female political leadership to emerge from the colonial period is that of treacherous and illegitimate authority. Kanjogera’s notoriety has eclipsed the positive contributions of many unnamed women in Rwandan history and has been used to discourage other women from seeking public roles.

Independence, First, and Second Republics

When it came in 1962, Rwandan independence was as much an overthrow of the ruling Tutsi minority, which had consolidated its privileged status and exclusive access to power under the Belgian colonial regime, as it was an overthrow of European rule.¹ The period of 1959 to 1964, characterized by ethnic violence, has been described as a “social revolution”²⁴ and an “ethnic transfer of power.”²⁵ In post-independence Rwanda, the Hutu majority established itself in the name of

¹ For a critique of the US government’s inaction in the face of the Rwandan genocide, see chapter 10 of Samantha Power’s *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). For a description of France’s complicity, see Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). Linda Melvern’s *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000) chronicles the failures of the UN system and the international community.

¹ In pre-colonial Rwanda, ethnic categories had been relatively fluid. They were based upon wealth and cattle ownership as well as biological parentage, leading some scholars to question whether Hutu and Tutsi could be accurately described as separate ethnic groups.

¹ See Catharine Newbury’s *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda, 1860–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) for a definitive study of the transformation of Rwandan society during the colonial period and the changing nature of the relationship between Hutu and Tutsi.

democracy as the new ruling elite. Over the years, there was a rise in discrimination against the Tutsi minority. Violence against Tutsi “increased in certain contexts, and diminished at other times” prior to 1994, in response to external pressures as well as government policy.²⁶

In fact, part of what allowed the violence and extremism of the early 1990s to succeed was the tolerance by both Rwandan society and the international community of smaller-scale violence against the Tutsi minority in the decades since the independence movement. Beginning in 1959, the violence of the independence era resulted in mass displacement and exile of Tutsis. An estimated 10,000 Tutsis were killed in 1963 following an insurgency led by exiled Tutsi forces.²⁷ Nine years later, in 1972–73, widespread violence again sent many Tutsi into exile. Both Grégoire Kayibanda and Juvenal Habyarimana, presidents of the First and Second Republics, periodically manipulated ethnic tensions and incited violence to mobilize the population, divert public attention from other issues, and consolidate support for their leadership.

The violence of this period, though devastating and precedent setting, was not on the scale of 1994. Another significant difference between the violence of this period and that of the genocide was the targeting of women during the latter. As Catharine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin point out, during the genocide,

“all Tutsi women were targeted, simply because they were Tutsi, and large numbers were killed, often after having been subjected to sexual violence and torture. Educated, elite women were attacked ... regardless of their ethnicity. Some Hutu women were subjected to violence by RPF soldiers, in revenge for the violence perpetrated by Hutu men.”²⁸

In his analysis of gendered aspects of the genocide, anthropologist Christopher Taylor also points to the targeting of women as a phenomenon that distinguishes 1994 from the violence in 1959 to 1964 or 1973.²⁹

Social Tension, Civil War, and the Arusha Accord

Though traditional constraints and customary law kept them out of the public sphere and they were not well represented in decision-making positions, some Rwandan women did realize increasing autonomy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Women’s relative gains contributed to social tensions in pre-genocide years. In Taylor’s analysis, such gains led to a social backlash and an increase in violence against women. Repression and rape, a gendered expression of the rising extremism, became more commonplace.³⁰ The harassment of women in pre-genocide Rwanda mirrors the experience of women in other pre-conflict settings.^k As the threat of civil war loomed in the early 1990s, Hutu extremists sought to carefully circumscribe women’s roles.

Hutu extremist propaganda targeted women. One popular tract, the “Hutu Ten Commandments,” was circulated widely and read aloud at public meetings. It portrayed Tutsi women as deceitful “temptresses” and urged Hutu women to protect Hutu men from treacherous influences. Three of the commandments addressed gender relations:

- “Each Hutu man must know that the Tutsi woman, no matter whom, works in solidarity with her Tutsi ethnicity. In consequence, every Hutu man is a traitor:
 - who marries a Tutsi woman
 - who makes a Tutsi woman his concubine
 - who makes a Tutsi woman his secretary or protégé
- Every Hutu man must know that our Hutu girls are more dignified and more conscientious in their roles as woman, wife, and mother. Aren’t they pretty, good secretaries and more honest!
- Hutu women, be vigilant bring your husbands, brothers, and sons to reason!”³¹

^k An increase in the repression of women’s rights frequently presages violence and war. In various contexts, violence against women has been documented as an early-warning indicator of impending war. See Chapter 9 of *Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts’ Assessment* (New York: UNIFEM, 2002) by Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Another important resource is *Gender and Conflict Early Warning: A Framework for Action* (London: International Alert, 2002) by Susanne Schmeidl and Eugenia Piza-Lopez.

In October of 1990, Rwandan exiles known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) joined together and invaded Rwanda from their base in neighboring Uganda. Targeting the authoritarian Hutu government led by President Habyarimana, the RPF demanded democratization and a solution for the hundreds of thousands of Tutsi refugees around the world who were prevented from returning to Rwanda. The ensuing civil war, which saw thousands of civilians displaced and killed, culminated in a ceasefire agreement signed in Arusha, Tanzania, in July 1992. The Arusha Accord, including the ceasefire as well as political talks aimed at a peace accord and power sharing agreement, was negotiated throughout 1992 and 1993 but never fully implemented.

On the evening of April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana's plane was shot down during its landing in Kigali and the genocide began immediately thereafter.¹ In an effort to stop the genocide, RPF troops began their invasion anew, and the civil war resumed, paralyzing an international community that was unable, and in many cases unwilling, to distinguish between genocidal violence and civil war.

1994 Genocide

The Rwandan genocide proceeded with unparalleled swiftness—upwards of 800,000 were killed in 100 days—and targeted the Tutsi minority and moderate Hutus throughout the country. Organized mobs and militia, known as the *Interahamwe*, were largely responsible for perpetrating the genocide and inciting ordinary Rwandans to violence. Local leaders and state-sponsored radio also urged citizens to kill. President Habyarimana's inner circle and key members of his party, the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND), have been implicated in the planning of the genocide.

Some women participated in the genocide alongside their brothers, fathers, and sons. They killed, tortured, informed, collaborated, and aided in communication with and between the *Interahamwe*.² As a group, women are not blameless.³ They did not, however,

participate in the same numbers that men did. In fact, women represent only 2.3 percent of genocide suspects in Rwanda (3,442 of 108,215 imprisoned in 2001).³³ For the most part, they were not planners or perpetrators of the genocide. As this report will demonstrate below, women are an important symbol of moderation in Rwanda today. They are trusted in the tasks of reconciliation and reconstruction in part because they have not been implicated in the violence to the same extent as men.

While few women were perpetrators of violence, many were victimized. Targeted for not only their ethnicity but also their gender, women were subjected to sexual assault and torture, including rape, forced incest, and breast oblation. One of the first victims of the genocide, Prime Minister Agathe Uwiringiyimana, was the first woman to hold that post. In the years leading up to the genocide, she was frequently depicted in extremist literature and political cartoons as sexually promiscuous and a threat to the nation.³⁴ Taylor suggests that, because she was a moderate Hutu, "her death owed as much to the fact that she was a woman, and a particularly articulate and outspoken one, as it did to the fact that she was a prominent member of the democratic opposition."³⁴

Women who survived the genocide lost husbands, children, relatives, and communities. They endured systematic rape and torture, witnessed unspeakable cruelty, and lost livelihoods and property. In addition to this violence, women faced displacement, family separation, and food insecurity, all of which resulted in post-conflict psychological trauma. Their social structures were destroyed, their relationships and traditional networks were severed, and they were left to head their households and communities. Rwandans believe that in their victimization and endurance, women bore the brunt of the genocide and therefore deserve a significant and official role in the nation's recovery. Men and women interviewed for this study repeatedly cited this as a primary reason women must be included in governance.

¹ The president of neighboring Burundi was killed on the same flight, yet Burundi, with a similar ethnic mix, did not descend into genocide.

² Women's participation in the genocide is well documented in the 1995 African Rights publication, *Not So Innocent: When Women Become Killers* by Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal. More recently (September 15, 2002), the *New York Times Magazine* highlighted the role of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, the so-called "Minister of Rape," in an article entitled "A Woman's Work," by Peter Landesman (82-116).

³ Notably, the same extremist literature also referred to Agathe Uwiringiyimana as a "Kanjogera," invoking the image of malevolent female leadership from Rwanda royal history. See Christopher C. Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

The Immediate Aftermath

The genocide ended in July 1994 with the victory of RPF troops. In the immediate aftermath, the population was 70 percent female (women and girls). Given this demographic imbalance, women immediately assumed multiple roles as heads of household, community leaders, and financial providers, meeting the needs of devastated families and society more broadly. They were the ones who picked up the pieces of a literally decimated society and began to rebuild. They buried the dead, found homes for nearly 500,000 orphans,³⁵ and built shelters.

Today, women remain a demographic majority in Rwanda, representing 54 percent of the population and contributing significantly to the productive capacity of the nation. A majority of the adult working population, they head 35 percent of households, are responsible for raising the next generation, and in this largely rural nation, produce the majority of all agricultural output. Quite simply, they are the majority constituency and the most productive segment of the population. Rwandan women play a vital role not only in physical reconstruction, but also in the crucial task of social healing, reconciliation, and, increasingly, governance.

PART TWO: TRANSITION AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

In 2003, as Rwanda nears the end of its transition period, it is important to bear in mind the country's failed attempts at democratization in the early 1990s, prior to the genocide. In scholar Roland Paris' assessment, attempts at political liberalization and an emphasis on democratic elections in the 1992 Arusha Accord "contributed to the collapse of a fragile peace." He argues that the genocide itself was "a conscious attempt by Hutu officials to thwart the planned elections and other elements of the Arusha Declaration that would have required them to share power with their adversaries."³⁶ Scholar Timothy Longman argues that in the case of Rwanda, the "deterioration of order" did not come from the

"unleashing of the lawless proclivities of the masses. Rather, disorder increased as a direct consequence of actions taken by state officers seeking to preserve their hold on power against the challenges presented by an increasingly autonomous and empowered civil society."³⁷

This history, and the attendant mistrust of democratization by some, must be factored into any analysis of Rwanda's political landscape.

Institutions within the international community that work on post-conflict reconstruction issues consider governance and the establishment of democratic political systems essential to fostering stability and sustainable peace. While international and bilateral organizations such as UNDP, USAID, or the World Bank differ in terms of their measurements and indicators of good governance, there is general consensus that participation (sometimes referred to as representation, inclusivity, or voice) is a critical component. Rarely, however, is the participation of women, or gender inclusivity, given priority or used as a principle measurement of good governance by such institutions. It is notable, then, that Rwanda has actively promoted and emphasized women's participation as a component of good governance.

Rwanda's Transitional Government

During its nine years, Rwanda's Government of National Unity has pursued a policy of decentralization and democratization. The government's *Strategy Paper for Good Governance* states that, "the genocide and its attendant destruction were orchestrated by an authoritarian and centralized state."³⁸ Based on its understanding of the origins of the genocide, the GNU has committed itself to the devolution of power and to widespread democratic participation. The strategy paper further indicates that democratization and decentralization are not just philosophical ideals but are necessary mechanisms for reconciliation and the prevention of future violence.

Rwanda has identified five areas for improving good governance: institutional strengthening and coordination, unity and reconciliation, peace and security, social welfare, civil society and the private sector, and economic planning and management. At the end of 2000, Rwanda evaluated the progress of its interim governance program and identified areas with significant gains. Highlighted were successes in gender policy, including providing support to genocide widows and other vulnerable groups, mainstreaming gender processes in key government institutions and policies, and developing a national gender policy.³⁹ The government recently adopted a new constitution, presidential elections were held in August 2003, with parliamentary elections scheduled for September 2003.

However tardy or imperfect the implementation of democracy in Rwanda,^o the GNU has made women's leadership and the inclusion of gender issues in government a hallmark of democratization plans. Women have come forward to lead in unprecedented numbers and have helped shape governance.

Why Gender Matters

The conflict in Rwanda was gendered; so must be the recovery. The genocide was not solely about violence between Hutu and Tutsi men. As described above,

^oIn November 2002, the International Crisis Group reported on governmental repression and the "restrictions on political and civil liberty" in *Rwanda at the End of the Transition: A Necessary Political Liberalisation*. The same month, a USAID publication entitled *Rwanda Democracy and Governance Assessment* (Washington, DC: Management Systems International, 2002) stated that "on balance, the current regime has made a number of positive advances in the area of good governance."

Tutsi women were targeted in part because they were Tutsi, but all women were at risk simply because they were women; sexual and gender-based violence was common. In the months and years prior to the genocide, Hutu extremists focused their propaganda on the alleged promiscuity and beauty of Tutsi women, as illustrated above. During the genocide, rape was used as a form of torture, and the sexual organs of both men and women were deliberately, brutally violated.⁴⁰ The ideology of genocide dictates that one ethnic group's ability to reproduce—most potently symbolized by the childbearing ability of women—must be extinguished.

Therefore, gender-based and sexual violence was employed as a means to destroy the Tutsi community. Rwanda's recovery and reconstruction must address the gendered implications of this violence, such as considering the specific needs of widows and women whose husbands are in prison, survivors of sexual torture and rape, children born of rape, and the spread of HIV/AIDS infection.

The genocide destroyed the social fabric of Rwanda. Demographics changed dramatically; women's roles in society and gender relations were fundamentally transformed. In the aftermath, women assumed non-traditional social and economic roles, stepped into the public sphere, and, as described above, took on new responsibilities. The genocide forced women to think of themselves differently and in many cases develop skills they would not otherwise have acquired.

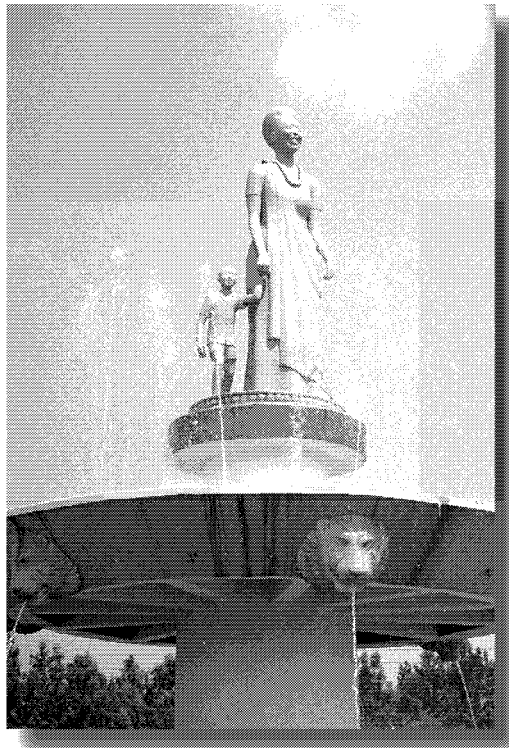
Poverty and illiteracy still fall disproportionately on women and girls, however. As major impediments to sustainable peace and development, they must be recognized as gendered problems in that they affect men and women differently. The literacy rate for women in Rwanda is less than 62 percent,⁴¹ the vast major-

ity are desperately poor, and there are high rates of HIV/AIDS infections. This has a severe impact on women, families, and social support systems; therefore, these problems must be approached with a gender perspective. In other words, addressing these problems must take into account the differing needs of women and men, girls and boys. Given the status of women in particular, programs that address women and girls' literacy and economic self-sufficiency must be supported.

There is an understanding among Rwandan officials interviewed for this study that attention to gender issues includes examining how men and women are affected differently by policies and laws, as well as being inclusive in the crafting of policies. The Ministry of Gender and Women in Development, for instance, addresses both concepts in training. Moreover, responsibility for gender issues has not been assumed only by women. Male civil servants also serve in gender posts, particularly at the local level.

In addition to highlighting that a gendered conflict must be addressed by a gendered peace, one of the most thought-provoking results of this research is the finding that many Rwandans perceive women to be "better" at forgiveness, reconciliation, and post-conflict

peace building than their male counterparts. These perceptions are based predominantly on two notions. First, Rwandans believe that most of the consequences of war and violence fall to women and that they are therefore highly motivated to prevent conflicts. The circumstances of their lives and burdens they carry cause women to recognize their *interdependence*; such pragmatism allows them to work across ethnic lines more easily than men.



Statue celebrating women, downtown Kigali.

“When war comes, the biggest impact is on women. The children who are remaining are the responsibility of women. Men are not there. So the women are peacemakers, and they are the ones that try to make peace.”

- Teddy Gacinya, founder of a women’s NGO and an elementary school⁴²

“[Women] have bigger problems. Most of the widows have children to take care of. Naturally they find that they can’t cope on their own. Even if she is a [genocide] survivor in the middle of all those people she thinks were against her, she is forced to work with them because she has nobody to turn to ... It is women who have accepted that challenge on themselves to try to change. More than the men. Women need more cooperation in the community.”

- Name Withheld, female Rwandan employee of an international NGO⁴³

Second, many Rwandans interviewed for this study perceive women to be predisposed (culturally or biologically) to forgiveness and reconciliation.

“Women are peaceful. When you compare women and men, there is a big difference in this area. And when they are involved in decision-making structures, they have [more] tolerance.”

- Christophe Bazivamo, Executive Secretary, National Election Commission ⁴⁴

“I think the way men think about peace may not be quite the same as women because women provide life. Men think of their [own] interests and naturally women think of others, of the family, of children before fulfilling their own interests ... Men and women can bring different skills to peace building.”

- Chantal Gatama, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Rwanda Field Office ⁴⁵

“My [Tutsi] sister is a nurse. She treats Hutu patients. Some of them are genocidaires. Maybe they killed my father. I could never do it. Women are better at it than men.”

- Name Withheld, male taxi driver, Kigali⁴⁶

Rwandans’ perceptions about women’s capacity for forgiveness seem to be substantiated by the reality of women’s leadership in reconciliation activities. For instance, the Imagine Coexistence Initiative, a UNHCR pilot project, began without a specific gender mandate but included among its lessons learned that “in Rwanda, women have taken a lead role in coexistence and reconciliation work.”⁴⁷ At a workshop hosted in part by the Imagine Coexistence Initiative, key findings included the recognition that women’s groups are particularly effective in “inter-ethnic cooperative income generating activities; work in and outside of prisons; inter-ethnic associations; ... and inter-ethnic solidarity and complicity to enable women to carry out advocacy.”⁴⁸ Scholar Peter Uvin has also observed the potential for reconciliation among women. Regarding the future of Rwanda, he says, “There is hope in women because they are the ones who are forced to survive. There are stories of many women being ready to set aside real or imagined differences to *live*.”⁴⁹

Even discussions of national security, traditionally a male arena, highlight the public recognition of women’s contributions. A variety of government and civil society sources, male and female, point to women in northern and northwestern Rwanda (Ruhengeri, Gisenyi, and Kibuye provinces) who have been instrumental in stabilizing border communities. These women are credited with convincing their husbands and sons living across the border in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to leave rebel groups and return to Rwanda to reintegrate. Secretary General Protais Musoni, in the Ministry of Local Government, described the cooperation this way:

“We worked seriously with the women ... Some women, their husbands were in the Congo, but you would find they were getting pregnant ... it was a clear indication that they are being visited by the husbands ... so we set up a process of contacting them, discussing with them. Normally [our] first reaction could have been, ‘Here is somebody working with the enemy, we should deal with her as an enemy.’ But we said, ‘No, let’s not take that route. Let’s work with them to convince their husbands to come back.’ ... There has been quite a lot of progress between 1998 and 2000 in terms of security ... [Women have] convinced husbands and children to come back and the government will do all

that is possible to make sure we are fair ... The women were a very big factor in the security in the northwest.”⁵⁰

This often-cited example of women in Ruhengeri, Gisenyi, and Kibuye demonstrates their critical role in maintaining the nation's security. Women are in a position to know their communities well and to serve as early warning of potential conflict. Ordinary civilian women at the grassroots level, as well as those serving in the Rwandan army and police force, are thus able to promote security. As a local government official in Kigali-Ngali Province put it,

“If there are men who are planning war, who are planning genocide, the women know. They know better than [those men]. So they should be ready to say what is being prepared down there [at the grassroots level].”⁵¹

Another perception of women, which is particularly common at the grassroots level, is that women are less corruptible than their male counterparts in local government. In focus groups conducted with women and men in two provinces,^P respondents frequently cited this as a reason women should be involved in government.

“Women in governance make a difference as we approach them easily, they are never absent-minded, they render complete services, they are empathetic, and they are never corrupt.”

- Female farmer, Kibungo Province⁵²

“Women are less prone to corruption than men; they offer services without embezzlement as men tend to do.”

- Male cell-level official, Ruhengeri Province⁵³

“Men in power tend to be corrupted, we have proof of that especially at the grassroots level. At the time of elections, men hesitated to vote for women, pretending that women cannot lead. Today, men are convinced that women have what it takes.”

- Male farmer, Ruhengeri Province⁵⁴

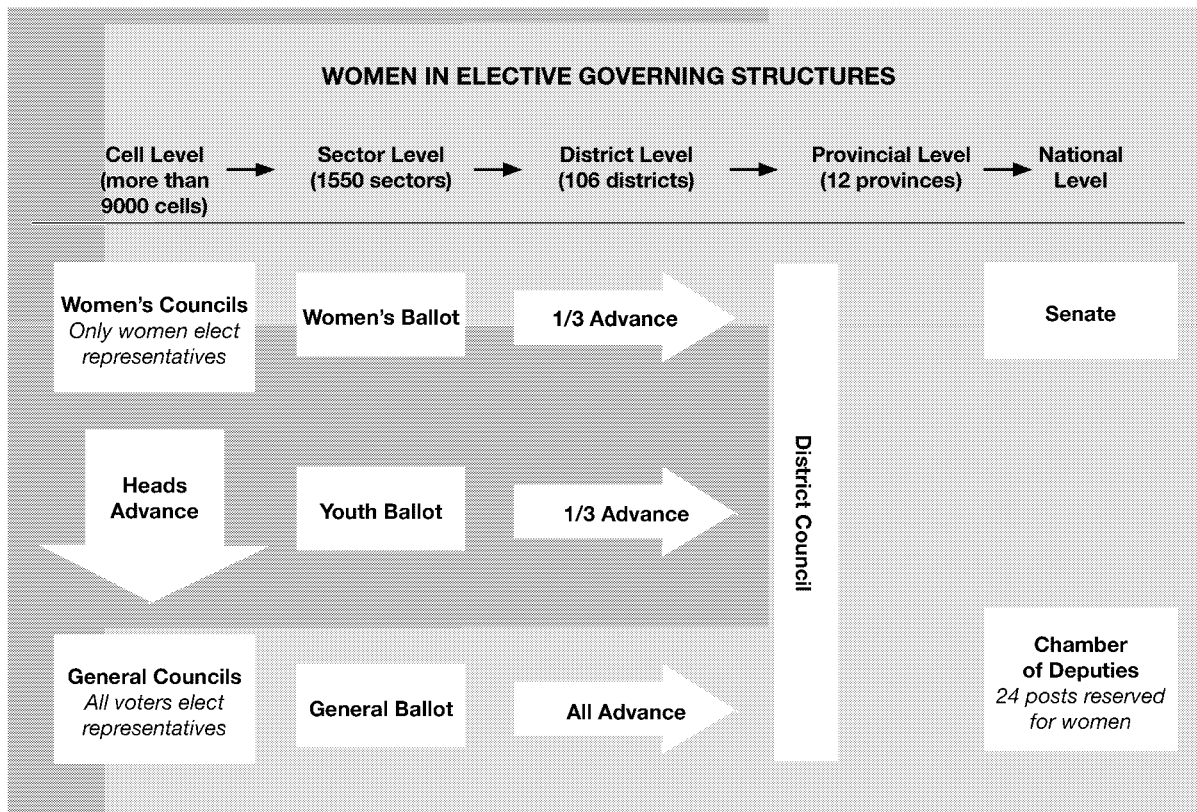
Considerations of gender—that is, the contributions of both men and women—are vital to good governance in Rwanda for all of these reasons: the gendered nature of the Rwandan conflict; the perceptions that women are better at reconciliation; the critical role that women play in community security; and the experience of Rwandans, particularly at the grassroots level, that women are less corrupt than men.

New Spaces, New Structures: Women Entering the Political Arena

The government's decision to include women in the governance of the nation was driven by a number of factors. The perceptions regarding women as “better” at reconciliation and post-conflict peace building, are a strong motivation. But the policy of inclusion also owes much to the RPF's exposure to gender equality issues in Uganda, where members spent many years in exile. Uganda uses a quota system to guarantee women's participation; in its parliament, one seat from each of 39 districts is reserved for a woman.⁵⁵ Men and women in the RPF were familiar with this system, as they were with the contributions and successes of women in South Africa's African National Congress (ANC). RPF members witnessed and embraced notions of gender equality, and this informed the development of gender-sensitive governance structures in post-genocide Rwanda.

A final, more skeptical analysis of this policy decision charges that the government could be using the inclusion of women and youth to divert attention from the absence of more ethnically plural and representative government. Because the country is 85 percent Hutu, however, this argument is problematic. Decentralization and the inclusion of women and youth at every administrative level will necessitate the inclusion of the majority population.

^P Two provinces, Ruhengeri (in the northwest) and Kibungo (in the east), were chosen to ensure geographic diversity. Focus groups were conducted with men and women and included people from a variety of backgrounds (returnees, released prisoners, widows, youths, farmers, and community leaders). Three districts in Ruhengeri and one district in Kibungo were included.



If decentralization were fully implemented, it would be difficult to maintain ethnic exclusivity in all the governing structures.⁹

Rwanda's commitment to the inclusion of women is evident throughout the government. At the level of national political leadership, the Rwandan government has made women visible with high-level appointments, including ministers of state and positions within the Office of the President, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement, and Environment. In addition to these senior women, the government has attempted to address women's concerns and gender implications in their policy planning. Rwanda is a signatory to various international instruments that uphold women's rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979), and the Platform for Action adopted at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995).

Finally, it has devised innovative structures to promote women's participation in governance at all administrative levels—from the smallest cell to the sector, district, provincial, and national levels. This analysis has identified three such structures.

1. Mainstreaming Gender

Throughout all levels of government in Rwanda, positions have been revived or created to address women's issues and gender concerns.

At the national level, the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (MIGEPROFE) is the institution with responsibility for coordinating^r the government's efforts vis-à-vis these issues.

⁹ Beyond the scope of this paper, but important for further study, is a comprehensive examination of whether the inclusion of women and youth in governance structures is, in fact, leading to inclusiveness in terms of ethnicity and background as well.

^r The ministry has evolved since the 1994 genocide. The original Ministry of Gender, the Family, and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO) has been split into two entities; responsibilities for the family and social affairs are now housed elsewhere.

MIGEPROFE's mandate includes gender mainstreaming in all national policies and programs, the promotion of a legal framework for equality between men and women, and the empowerment of women in the economic, social, and political sectors.⁵⁶ It is important to note that this ministry has responsibility for both "gender" concerns and "women's empowerment" and has made deliberate efforts not to conflate the terms or issues.

In terms of gender mainstreaming, for example, MIGEPROFE helped to establish gender focal points in other key ministries. These focal points work closely with MIGEPROFE to ensure coordination between the two bodies, and to monitor progress on women's issues within each ministry. In a consultative process described more fully below, MIGEPROFE works with other branches of government and civil society to review laws and measure the impact of proposed legislation and policies on women and men. Laws regarding rights within marriage and inheritance have been revised, and work is being done to make a proposed land law gender sensitive.

Further, MIGEPROFE staff conducts gender awareness training for various populations throughout the country. Officials at all levels of government, from political appointees down to entry-level civil servants, are trained. In order to mainstream the issue in public schools, the ministry has contributed elements of gender sensitivity to civic education guides for teachers and students. There has been outreach to religious communities as well. Churches and mosques have invited the ministry to conduct trainings on the importance of gender considerations in the development process.

MIGEPROFE's gender training began in 1999 as a training-of-trainers program that occurred in every province. These sessions, conducted primarily with local civil servants and Communal Development Committees, equip participants with gender skills and reinforce their abilities to conduct gender analysis in policy planning. The curriculum and report of one such training, held in Gitarama in February 2002 for provincial staff, illustrates MIGEPROFE's approach. At the start of the training most participants understood that gender "was the promotion of women in different spheres of life," but a few understood that "it was a development strategy that catered for both men and women."⁵⁷ After a brainstorming session that solicited participants' experiences and perceptions of gender, the following concepts were introduced:

- Gender equality was explained as giving both men and women equal opportunities and possibilities, he [the facilitator] said that ... there should be gender mainstreaming in policies, programmes, and projects.
- Gender equity was defined as a sense of treating the individual persons in an equitable and fair manner in order to ensure equity of results. The facilitator said that there should be affirmative action and ... gender analysis, both quantitative and qualitative.
- Gender analysis was explained as a tool used to ensure participation and sharing of benefits in the development process by men and women, girls and boys.⁵⁸

The trainers and trainees in the program are men and women. Conducted primarily in the Kinyarwanda language, training programs use a variety of words to describe the concept of gender: the English word "gender" (which has found its way into the local language), as well as the Kinyarwanda words for equality (*ubulinganire*) and complementarity (*ubwuzuzanye*), the idea that women and men, while different, complement one another.

In terms of women's empowerment, MIGEPROFE has taken steps such as establishing communal funds to encourage women's economic self-sufficiency. Similarly, women's political empowerment has been promoted through the establishment of women's councils (described below). The ministry also monitors political debates and legislation on all issues to evaluate the potential impact on women. "The Ministry has been working on land reform," for example,

"because that is women's life in Rwanda. Most of them are peasants. They work on the land. [It] is their property ... the Ministry works on [that issue] to make sure of women's presence,"

explains Marie Claire Mukasine, executive secretary of MIGEPROFE.⁵⁹

At the **provincial** level, there are civil servants with gender and women's portfolios. One of six provincial directors is responsible for the Division of Gender, Health, and Social Affairs. In Kigali-Ngali Province, a man named Louis Rusa holds this post. His priorities are eradicating violence against women, fighting the effects of AIDS, and alleviating poverty and illiteracy. In this struggle, he tries to train men and women to "show them the benefits of the promotion

of women, that they can contribute to the family, [and] that development cannot come from men only.” He acknowledges that some men are “very resistant [to the inclusion of gender issues and women in government] because of culture” and that, in fact, some women “still in this culture resist also because they don’t understand.” But this is changing, and he points to recent elections where women were elected to 28 percent of posts at the sector level in his province. There should be more women, he argues, but “the problem is that there are not enough women who have been to school, that have the capacity to be leaders.”⁶⁰

As part of decentralization efforts, the position of Vice-Mayor for Gender has been created at the **district** level. The Vice-Mayor’s primary mandate is gender mainstreaming, specifically with regard to development activities. Finally, local women’s councils are active at the **cell** levels. Responsibilities of these local women’s councils are described more fully below.

2. Triple Balloting

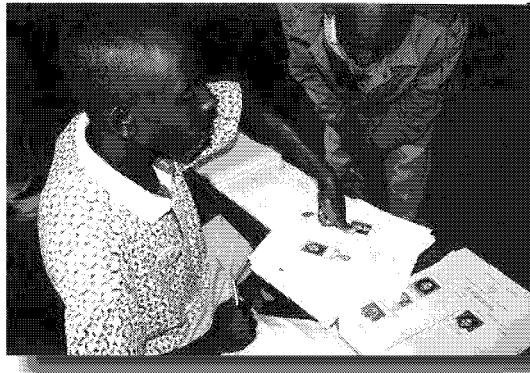
In the 2001 sector and district elections, Rwanda employed an electoral mechanism aimed at including women (and youth, who also have been defined as a formerly underrepresented group) in governance.⁶¹

In those elections at the sector level, each voter used three ballots: a general ballot, a women’s ballot, and a youth ballot. Voters selected one person on each ballot, thus picking a general candidate (frequently, but not necessarily, a man), a woman, and a young person. Through a subsequent indirect election, a district council was chosen from among candidates who won at the sector level. This district council included all of those elected on the general ballot, one-third of the

women, and one-third of the youth. From that group, the district mayor and other executive committee officials were chosen.

This system has been effective at getting women into office: 27 percent of those elected to the district councils in 2001 were women.⁶¹ Women’s participation in the executive committees remains limited, however, as they account for only 5 of 106 district mayors. Even so, the process is providing new space for women who in the past would not have entered the political arena.

Among the female district mayors, Florence Kamili Kayiraba, for example, believes that she was elected mayor because she came not through the women’s ballot but through the general ballot, which required candidates to have a higher level of education. She chose to run on the general ballot because she had the higher level of qualifications and could therefore leave space for others to run on the women’s ballot:



A poll worker demonstrates the triple ballot voting technique in March 2001 elections.

“If I had passed through the women’s [ballot], it would have been easy for me because the competition would have been less ... there were very few women and many

of them were timid and would not stand [against men for election] ... There was more competition in the general election, because there you meet men who have [previously] been in [public] service. It wasn’t easy. But I felt it would be unfair [to run on the women’s ballot] because I had the potential for standing in the general competition and could leave the other place for [a woman] who is a bit shy and cannot come up for the other post.”⁶²

⁶¹ These elections were widely judged free and fair by the international community and observers. Six months later, a more in-depth examination was made by the International Crisis Group in their report “*Consensual Democracy in Post-Genocide Rwanda: Evaluating the March 2001 District Elections*” (2001).

Her campaign platform had three priorities: finding shelters for the homeless and landless, building a covered market to replace the open-air market in Kicukiro, and dealing with sanitary and health concerns created by the garbage dump for all of Kigali (solid and human waste), which is located in her district. She has a five-year term to address these concerns; the challenges are enormous.

Kayiraba cites lack of experience and fear of competing, campaigning, and marketing themselves as reasons many Rwandan women are still reluctant to stand for office. As one of only five women mayors, she feels a responsibility to be a model for other women and to encourage them to stand for office. It is imperative to have more women in office, she feels, because they are responsible, committed, and often perform better than men because they have the “patience of listening to [their] citizens.” Women in government are more accessible to their constituents, she argues, especially female constituents:

“It is not easy for a man to be approached, but it is easy for women. Especially by fellow women. I get so many women coming up, telling me their personal problems, the conflict between the families ... that kind of thing, a problem, financial issues ... they will tell me their problems. For example, the Vice-Mayor in charge of Social Affairs is a man but they don't go to [him], they come to me. Then after I have listened to them, I either call him or take that person to him and say, ‘Please look into that matter and see what we can do to help.’ [Women] are more comfortable coming to me [first] than coming to the person in charge of that very [issue].”⁶³

In sum, the introduction of triple balloting in March 2001 guaranteed that women would constitute at least 20 percent of district-level leadership. It also provided room in the system for women who were not comfortable challenging men directly in elections. They were able to compete against other women and gain experience campaigning and serving in government.

3. A Parallel System: *Women's Councils and Women-Only Elections*

The third structure that Rwanda established is the parallel system of women's councils (mentioned above) and women's elections. Women's councils are grassroots structures elected at the cell level **by women only** (and then through indirect election at each successive

administrative level), which operate parallel to the general local councils and represent women's concerns. In principle, these women's councils are meant to exist at all. In practice, in recent years the cell level councils have formed, but at other levels their formation has been hindered by a lack of resources.

MIGEPROFE established the women's councils shortly after the genocide, and their role has since been expanded considerably. These 10-member councils include representatives for legal affairs, civic education, health, and finance. Rather than having a policy implementation function, these councils have an advocacy role. They are involved in skills training and making local women aware of their rights, as well as in advising the generally elected bodies on issues that affect women and taking women's concerns to them. These councils ensure that women's views on education, health, security, and other issues are articulated to local authorities. While the women's councils are important in terms of decentralization and grassroots engagement, lack of resources prevents them from maximizing their impact. Members of local women's councils are not paid, and because they must volunteer in addition to performing their paid work and family responsibilities, the councils are less effective and less consistent than they could be. Nevertheless, women in these grassroots councils have been effective in carving out new political space.

The head of the women's council holds a reserved seat on the local General Council, ensuring official representation of women's concerns and providing a link between the two systems. Although the councils have not formed on a permanent basis at other levels, women came together on an ad hoc basis to elect representatives for higher office. Thus, during the transition years, two women serving in Rwanda's national parliament were elected by only the women of the country with a mandate to address women's issues.

Berthe Mukamusoni, one of the two parliamentarians elected through the women's councils by the women of the country, explains the importance of this system:

“In the history of our country and society, women could not go in public with men. Where men were, women were not supposed to talk, to show their needs. Men were to talk and think for them. So with [the women's councils], it has been a mobilization tool. It has mobilized them: it has educated [women] ... It has brought

them to some [level of] self-confidence, such that when the general elections are approaching, it becomes a topic in the women's [councils]. 'Women as citizens, you are supposed to stand, to campaign, give candidates, support other women.' They have acquired a confidence of leadership."⁶⁴

Rwanda's new constitution, ratified in May 2003, demonstrates an even more dramatic commitment to women's inclusion; 24 of 80 seats in the lower house of parliament (Chamber of Deputies) are to be set aside for women, beginning with the fall 2003 elections.

What Has Been the Impact?

The attention to gender issues at all levels of government reflects the priority Rwanda has placed on mainstreaming. Like all aspects of local government, however, these offices are extremely underfunded. Few resources are available for their activities or development. Those who participate must do so on a volunteer basis; therefore, the level of activity is inconsistent. Additionally, concerns about coordination and competing mandates of these various posts stifle their full potential and effectiveness.

Despite overwhelming difficulties, the three structures described above have provided women with a forum and public space in which they can articulate their opinions and concerns. Rwandans determined that this separate space for women was necessary because, in the words of Soline Nyirahabimana of the Office of the President, "Men are used to speaking in public and campaigning. Historically, women [in Rwanda] have not competed against men. They fear competing against men in general elections. Even some women who are able [to compete] fear the visibility."⁶⁵ The new structures have begun to address these fears and alter notions of acceptable gender roles.

In the 1999 elections for general local councils, women won 13.7 percent of seats. Two years later, having gained experience and confidence in the women's councils, and having gained exposure with the triple-balloting system, women won 27 percent of seats in the sector and district elections. As discussed below,

in the 2001-2002 election of *gacaca* judges, women were elected to 35 percent of cell-level judgeships, a position they were not previously allowed to hold.

It is still too early to assess fully the difference women are making in these positions, and the lack of capacity and resources remain significant impediments. But it is worth noting that public discourse and recent election results indicate that Rwandans—both men and women—are increasingly willing to see women as leaders with decision-making authority.

Promoting Good Governance: Women's Contributions

Women's contributions to specific components of good governance prioritized by both the Rwandan government and the international community are outlined below. Particular attention is given to women's contributions to policymaking, national reconciliation, the national constitution, strengthening parliament, and strengthening civil society.

1. Influencing and Formulating Policies

Historically, politics in Rwanda has been characterized by the dominance of one ethnic group to the exclusion of the others. In colonial Rwanda, the Belgians privileged the Tutsi minority over the Hutu majority. Later, under post-independence governments, "majority rule" in the name of democracy excluded the Tutsi minority. In the years since 1994, the GNU has abolished ethnic identity cards and discouraged those who would distinguish between Hutu and Tutsi, emphasizing unity as a goal for all Rwandans. Some observers charge that this has been an attempt by the RPF to mask the increasingly homogeneous and Tutsi-dominated national government. While deliberately avoiding the divisive issue of ethnicity, however, the GNU has attempted to diversify governance structures in other ways by bringing women and youth into government.[†]

As noted above, women played critical roles within the RPF during the pre-genocide struggle. Such involvement provided them a platform from which to advocate for women's inclusion during the transitional

[†] Beyond the scope of this study, but an important topic for further study elsewhere, are the structures that Rwanda has put in place to encourage the representation of youth in post-genocide reconstruction.

phase. Lieutenant Colonel Rose Kabuye, the highest-ranking woman in the Rwandan army and a veteran of the RPF movement, explained:

“It started in Uganda, with the beginning of the struggle ... men did not start alone. Because women were part of what was going on, the men started cooperating ... It spread like that ... women took [on] very big responsibilities. After the struggle, men realized women are hard-working, they can do [anything] and ... then [they] believed in what women were able to do.”⁶⁶

Another woman active in the RPF who has been credited with transforming women's roles and promoting women's leadership is Aloisea Inyumba.

The first women's minister after the genocide, she later served as executive secretary of the Unity and Reconciliation Commission and is now préfet of Kigali-Ngali Province. Dr. Anastase Shyaka, a researcher at the Rwandan National University's Center for Conflict Management, lauds Inyumba's leadership and says that “she succeeded in creating women's sense of ownership in this country; they [women] think and feel that the destiny of the country is their own.”⁶⁷

The RPF's liberation rhetoric was embraced by its own members and applied to the historic exclusion of not only the Tutsi minority but also women, a gender sensitivity that is now government policy. As John Mutamba, an official at MIGEPROFE, explains,

“Men who grew up in exile know the experience of discrimination ... Gender is now part of our political thinking. We appreciate all components of our population across all the social divides, because our country ... [has] seen what it means to exclude a group.”⁶⁸



Aloisea Inyumba, préfet of Kigali-Ngali province, meeting with rural women, July 2003

The overwhelming burdens on women and their extraordinary contributions are very much part of public discourse in Rwanda. Their heroic efforts are recognized and lauded at the highest levels of government, by average Rwandans, on radio, and even in public art. Government officials at all levels are comfortable talking about women's contributions, their participation, the centrality of gender considerations to their efforts, and also the progress that has yet to be made. In April of 2003, speaking about the upcoming general elections, President Paul Kagame said, “We shall continue to appeal to women to offer themselves as candidates and also to vote for gender-sensitive men who will defend and protect their interests.” He continued, as quoted by Xnews Agency,

“Women's under-representation distances elected representatives from a part of their constituency and, as such, affects the legitimacy of political decisions ... Increased participation of women in politics is, therefore, necessary for improved social, economic and political conditions of their families and the entire country.”⁶⁹

Members of the international community have also remarked on the progressive gender politics and role of women in Rwanda. Suzanne Fafin, UNDP governance programme manager, observes that the commitment to women's inclusion “is not being driven by outsiders. [There is a] belief in the dynamism of women, because women are very proactive here [in Rwanda], and they have a lot of influence.”⁷⁰

2. Advancing Reconciliation

The appointment of women to inaugurate and head key institutions with responsibility for post-genocide reconciliation—the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission and the *Gacaca* Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court—is indicative of the influential role

that at least a small number of women have. These appointments provide a high degree of visibility for women's leadership and further demonstrate the practical and symbolic role women are playing in Rwandan society.

National Unity and Reconciliation Commission

The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) was established in March 1999 to coordinate the government's efforts on national unity, reconciliation, peace, and security. It was charged with conceiving and disseminating "ideas and initiatives aimed at promoting peace among Rwandans" and inculcating a "culture of national unity and reconciliation." From the start, this was not viewed as solely a psycho-social program for individual healing; it was intended as a tool for promoting good governance and combating the "bad thoughts which resulted from governance based on discrimination and division."⁷¹

The first executive secretary of the NURC, Aloisea Inyumba, oversaw its conception, design, and initial programs. From the outset, NURC staff worked with the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development to understand the roles that men and women play in development and peace building. Other trainings and study trips included learning from South African experts about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in that country, training in traditional African models of conflict resolution, and studying Scandinavian models of good governance.

In addition to receiving training and guidance from outside experts, the NURC shaped its agenda through grassroots consultations throughout the country. Through its representatives in each province, the NURC consulted Rwandans on their perceptions of the disunity and division that led to the genocide and explored ways to promote the sensitive issues of unity and reconciliation. These consultations led to the development of major program areas in civic education, conflict resolution, and support of community initiatives.

The civic education program organized solidarity camps (*ingando*) for various sectors of the population, including students from the National University, members of the local defense forces, provincial government staff, and former resistance fighters. Now Préfet of Kigali-Ngali Province, Aloisea Inyumba

described the reintegration of former *Forces Armées Rwandaises* and *Interahamwe* soldiers she oversaw during her tenure as executive secretary of the NURC:

"We would encourage the relatives to come and visit them [soldiers who had returned from the Congo]. It was so emotional when you would see a mother coming in to see her son, a wife coming in to visit her husband. ... It was mainly a confidence-building program, we would organize football games with the ex-soldiers and the communities ... We were preparing the communities to receive them, but we also conducted a civic education program for [the former soldiers]. We also conducted HIV testing ... The soldiers are now fully integrated in the communities, they have formed small clubs of reconciliation, some of them teach reconciliation now ... they conduct music, songs, dancing. They are no longer looked at as enemies of the state and the population. They are looked at as actors in the process of reconciliation."⁷²

While some charge that *ingando* are highly politicized acts of indoctrination, many participants feel that they have been instrumental in changing attitudes. A Rwandan student at the National University in Butare who attended the mandatory two-month *ingando* session with other incoming students explained that the camps helped students develop friendships across ethnic lines and bridge the gap between Francophone and Anglophone students.

"We go to the same solidarity camp. We dress the same way ... We are given the same mattress, the same blanket ... you may find that you are sleeping next to a survivor, with a person from northern Rwanda, or southern Rwanda, you may find that you are sleeping next to someone who has a parent in prison [as a suspected *genocidaire*] ... You interact. You see the humanity in the other person. You find that after the solidarity camps everyone is your friend. Most of my friends [at University] I got to know at the solidarity camp."⁷³

The current executive secretary of the NURC, Fatuma Ndagiza, also a woman, describes her mandate this way:

"The Commission has been doing a program of education and sensitization [for] Rwandans on the importance of unity and reconciliation. We

also have this function of monitoring government institutions and political parties to make sure that their actions are in line with reconciliation principles ... Whatever ideology you have shouldn't be based on divisionism and discrimination; it has to unite people. If, for example, you have a program on poverty reduction, this program should be for all Rwandans: it shouldn't be for one group. So, we are saying, everybody, the young, the women, the elderly, everybody should see themselves in the nation-building process."⁷⁴

Lizanne McBride, former Rwanda country director for the International Rescue Committee, has described the leadership of Aloisea Inyumba and Fatuma Ndagiza as pivotal: "Inyumba was inventive, and Fatuma will be critical for pushing ahead the agenda [of the NURC]."⁷⁵

Gacaca

In the aftermath of the genocide, more than 100,000 prisoners—suspected *genocidaires*—are being held in overcrowded Rwandan jails, awaiting trials the country's justice system does not have the capacity to process. In 2001, Rwanda revived a traditional conflict resolution mechanism—the *gacaca* system—to cope with the overflow. Historically, *gacaca* (literally "grassy space"⁷⁶) was a community-based system of justice that took place outdoors and dealt primarily with property crimes and small grievances. Today, *gacaca* "courts" have been established in every cell to deal with crimes of genocide.⁷⁷ This model of justice is participatory and restorative in nature, as it is designed not only to accelerate the judicial process, but also to further reconciliation at the community level. Not without controversy, *gacaca* has been criticized by survivors of the genocide who fear that the guilty will be freed, by Hutu who see the process as flawed because it will not try crimes of the RPF, and by human rights groups because it does not meet international legal standards. Given the complexities of the situation and the magnitude of the tragedy it is designed to address, it is not surprising that the *gacaca* system is imperfect.

Women did not serve as *gacaca* judges traditionally, as those positions were reserved for a community's wise and respected men (*inyangamugayo*). In creating

a national institution to revive and formalize *gacaca*, however, the GNU has promoted women's participation. The appointed head of the Department of *Gacaca* Jurisdictions, Aloysie Cyanzayire, is a woman; and in elections at the cell level, women won 35 percent of judgeships, thus serving as *inyangamugayo* along with men.⁷⁷

In a 2001 report on women's participation in *gacaca*, journalist Julia Crawford, who reports on *gacaca* for Hironelle News Service, concludes that women are playing "an important role in the country's upcoming system of post-genocide traditional justice, or 'gacaca.'" In Murambi sector outside of Kigali, women were elected to 8 of 19 judgeships (42 percent) in one cell. A successful *gacaca* process depends on women's active participation—not only as elected judges, but also as community members who will speak out honestly and participate in the public uncovering of genocide crimes. Crawford continues,

"Women ... expressed the view that women judges will be 'more honest' and more likely to inspire truth telling about what happened during the 1994 genocide. They were not surprised that women were starting to take a more assertive role because, as one said, 'it is the women who are bearing all the burdens here.'"

The cell that has 42 percent female judges also has a particularly high percentage of female-headed households, so Hutu and Tutsi alike are struggling to support their families alone.⁷⁸

Crawford's assessment is borne out by field research conducted for this study. *Gacaca* is an enormous social experiment and observers feel it is an imperfect but necessary solution to a nearly insurmountable problem. There is strong consensus, however, that if *gacaca* is to succeed, it will depend upon Rwanda's women. The majority of survivors and the majority of witnesses, women's testimony and participation in *gacaca* is crucial. As Father Elias Kiwanuka, a parish priest in Gitarama province and head of the church's Peace and Justice Commission, has explained:

⁷⁴ The *Gacaca* Law has categorized various acts of genocide. The most heinous or "category one" crimes will be handled by the formal court system; categories two through four will be handled by *gacaca* courts.

“During the genocide ... all were killed, but especially men. And ... men participated in the genocide, so many men are in prison. During the war, women would remain at home. They saw what was happening. When men would go for killing or for [looting], women were always at home seeing what was taking place. So [you must] work with women to find the truth, discover the truth. Especially in the *gacaca*.”⁷⁹

3. Drafting the Constitution

In May 2003, Rwanda adopted a new constitution. Women’s contributions to drafting the new constitution—as citizens engaged in consultation processes, as active civil society participants, and as members of the Constitutional Commission—were instrumental in shaping a gender-sensitive and inclusive document.

Judith Kanakuze, one of three women on the 12-member Constitutional Commission that oversaw the drafting, explains that the Commission was concerned about the rights of women “from the beginning.” The Commission was receptive to the committee of women from the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development, and the NGO group Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, which prepared a memorandum that included recommendations on creating a gender-sensitive constitution.⁸⁰

After months of consultation throughout the country by members of the Constitutional Commission, a national convention was held in November 2002 to discuss the draft constitution. Women from all social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds participated in this national forum. In attendance were parliamentarians; national and local leaders; women from civil society; representatives of economic cooperatives, such as a representative of women farmers from Gitarama; rep-

resentatives of special interest groups, such as a blind woman there on behalf of the physically handicapped; and students, including young women from the National University.

Because of their careful preparation and strong participation, it was clear these women understood the precedent-setting role they played. As they prepared suggestions and questions for the debate over the national constitution, women also set themselves to combat cultural stereotypes. Unaccustomed to debating men publicly, rural women in particular coached themselves:

“Speak in a clear voice and don’t forget to introduce yourself before your comment; ‘Let’s not make men think, as they’ve always thought, that women talk too much: be brief;’ and, ‘Try not to complain about what we do not have but ask for what you need by making it a suggestion.’”⁸¹

Women parliamentarians served as the legal advisers to the other participants, briefed them on what to expect, and encouraged their participation. Such preparation, as basic as it may seem, allowed these women to submit their ideas on equal footing with men and made it difficult for those who were resistant to women’s contributions to dismiss them.

Issues women introduced at the national convention ranged from those that affect women primarily, such as the inheritance law or women’s educational opportunities, to wider economic, social, and political questions. The representative of farmers, for instance, introduced her constituency’s need for agriculture and small business loans from rural banks. A woman director of an orphanage recommended that the new constitution establish a commission in charge of vulnerable young people that could serve as a lobbying force for them. A woman parliamentarian introduced concerns about



Judith Kanakuze and Justine Uvuza, working with women

the church's jurisdiction over certain legal proceedings. Finally, primarily as a result of women's contribution to the drafting, Rwanda's constitution includes the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and grants women 30 percent of all seats in the lower house of parliament, the Chamber of Deputies.⁸²

Formally adopted by referendum in May 2003, the constitution includes among its fundamental principles the "eradication of ethnic and regional divisions and the promotion of national unity" as well as respect for the "equality of all Rwandans and between Rwandan women and men."⁸³

4. Strengthening Parliament

At the time of publication, Rwanda is holding its first direct elections for parliament in September 2003. Previously, parliamentarians were appointed by political parties.^v The chart below indicates the number of women that each political party has appointed.^{84w} As described above, in addition to women who represent their political parties, there are two women in parlia-

ment whose constituency is only women and whose responsibility it is to specifically represent their concerns (see section on women's councils above).

In addition to performing all of the functions their male counterparts do, women in Rwanda's parliament have formed a caucus known as the Forum of Women Parliamentarians. This is the first such caucus in Rwanda, where members work together across party lines. Member of Parliament Connie Bwiza Sekamana explains, "When it comes to the Forum, we unite as women, irrespective of political parties. So we don't think of our parties, [we think of] the challenges that surround us as women."⁸⁵

The Forum has several roles. It reviews existing laws and introduces amendments to discriminatory statutes, examines proposed laws with an eye toward gender sensitivity, and conducts meetings and trainings with women's groups to sensitize and advise the population about legal issues. Members of the Forum view their legislative work as a contribution to, in the words of parliamentarian Sekamana, "changing the concept

Representatives in Parliament During Transition Period

Political Party/Sector	Number of Representatives	Number of Women	Percent Women
RPF	13	6	46%
MDR	13	2	15%
PL	13	3	23%
PSD	13	2	15%
PDC	6	2	33%
PDI	2	0	0%
PSR	2	0	0%
UDPR	2	0	0%
Army	6	0	0%
Youth	2	0	0%
Women	2	2	100%
Totals	74	17	23%

^v Those political parties designated by the Arusha Accord are represented in parliament and appoint members.

^w The information in this chart is as of July 2002. Full names of political parties are listed in Appendix B.

and thinking of the Rwandese society” and combating the “mentality whereby ... to be a woman in our society meant to be a nobody.”⁸⁶

A significant recent legislative achievement was the revoking of laws that prohibited women from inheriting land. In the Rwandan context, inheritance law is not just a matter of women’s rights—it has a direct impact on issues such as food production and security, the environment, and settlement patterns. Patricie Hajabakiga, currently secretary general in the Ministry of Lands, Human Resettlement, and Environmental Protection, was a member of parliament in 1999 during the debate on inheritance. She describes the efforts of women parliamentarians this way:

“We had a long, long sensitization campaign ... This was a very big debate where we were asking [male parliamentarians], ‘Ok, fine, you think only men can inherit, not girls. But as a man, you have a mother who might lose the property from your father because [your uncles] will take everything away from your mother. Would you like that?’ Then we said, ‘you are a man ... you have children, you have a daughter who owns property with her husband. Would you like to see that daughter of yours, [if] her husband dies, everything is taken away.’ When you personalize things, they tend to understand. When [the issues] remain just in the abstract ... women and men become two distinct people. But the moment you personalize it, they do understand.”⁸⁷

Médard Rutijanwa, a member of parliament from the Labor Party, recognizes the role that the Forum of Women Parliamentarians has played. “They work across parties. They are there as women leaders. Their

contribution is needed ... They are important in reconciliation.”⁸⁸ The Forum was the first caucus in the Rwanda National Assembly. Subsequent to its establishment, two other such fora have been established that include members from all political parties: the Amani Forum, which is a regional peace organization, and a Rwandan forum on population issues.

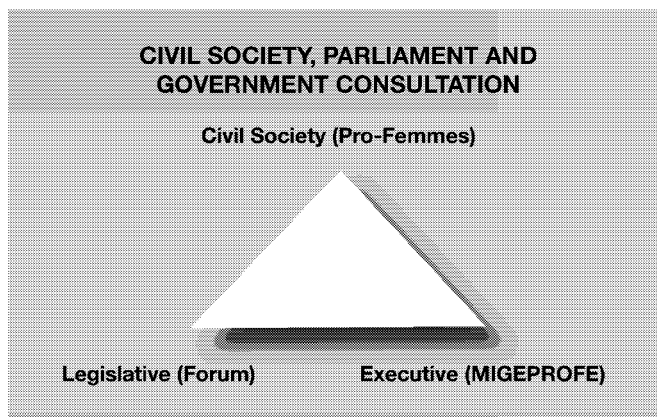
5. Participating Through Civil Society

Perhaps where we see women making the most significant contributions to governance is through their participation in civil society. Immediately after the genocide, with communities destroyed and the government in disarray, women’s NGOs stepped in to fill the vacuum, providing a variety of services to the

population. Women came together on a multiethnic basis to reconstitute the umbrella organization Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, established in 1992. Pro-Femmes, which coordinated the activities of 13 women’s NGOs in 1992, now coordinates more than 40 such organizations.^x

It has been particularly effective in organizing the activities of women, advising the government on issues of women in democracy, and promoting reconciliation through its Action Campaign for Peace, which requires all member NGOs to have a peace platform and undertake activities and programs designed to promote peace and reconciliation.

Women in Rwanda’s civil society have initiated a system of consultations with the local population, their grassroots membership, and women serving in government. They have developed a three-pronged mechanism for coordinating their advocacy among civil society (represented by the women’s umbrella organization Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe), the executive branch (MIGEPROFE), and the legislative



^x Many consider Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe to be primarily a Tutsi umbrella group; some of its member organizations such as Réseau des Femmes are, however, known for greater diversity.

branch (the Forum of Women Parliamentarians). An illustration of this consultation mechanism is the process that Rwandan women's civil society participated in around the ratification of the new constitution. To elicit concerns, interests, and suggestions regarding a new constitution, Pro-Femmes held multiple consultations with its member NGOs and women at the grassroots level throughout the country. They then met with representatives of MIGEPROFE and the Forum of Women Parliamentarians to report members' concerns. Together the three institutions contributed to a policy paper, which was submitted to the Constitutional Commission, which recommended specific actions for making the constitution gender-sensitive. Once the draft constitution reflected their interests, Pro-Femmes engaged in a sensitization and mobilization campaign encouraging women to support the adoption of the document in the countrywide referendum.

A recent report commissioned by USAID recognizes the challenges faced by Rwandan civil society, including limited capacity, coordination, and excessive control by the government,⁸⁹ but commends the significant role Pro-Femmes plays in shaping public policy. The study concludes that women's NGOs are the "most vibrant sector" of civil society in Rwanda and that "Pro-Femmes is one of the few organizations in Rwandan civil society that has taken an effective public advocacy role."⁹⁰

Through the coordination mechanism that women in civil society have forged with women in the executive and legislative branches of government, women in Rwanda have an increasingly powerful voice. Understandably, their impact has been greatest with regard to those issues that are traditionally considered "women's issues." But more and more, women are exerting their influence over non-traditional issues, such as constitutional law and security concerns. The government does not adopt new policies without taking into consideration the voice of women, as represented in local government and at the national level by the troika of Pro-Femmes, the Ministry, and the Forum of Women Parliamentarians.

CONCLUSION: ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

War and violence, however devastating, often have a dual effect on women. On the one hand they place an unbearable burden on women, exposing them to considerable threats. On the other hand, they create political space for women's voices. The Rwandan genocide was a tragedy of almost incalculable magnitude. Because it was so traumatic and so swift, it opened up a correspondingly dramatic space for women:

"Equality between men and women started before the war ... [but] it was sped up because of the genocide. Because they [Rwandans] had direct experience that shows that in some cases where a woman is not under the responsibility of a man, she can survive. And for that, she needs more rights, she needs more education."

- Isabelle Kalihangabo, Department of Gacaca Jurisdictions⁹¹

"I think although the genocide was a disaster, it has helped women realize their capacity, because women have been left on their own. Now when you walk in Kigali, you find the people working, sweeping, cutting grass, etc., [and] the majority are women. They are building. There's no one left to do that work, so they are doing it. Somehow it enhanced their capacity. It has empowered them a lot. No more living in the village, sitting home, waiting for their husband to take care ... It is completely changed."

- Name withheld, Rwandan NGO employee⁹²

"I was here before the genocide, between 1982-1984, and at that time when we received [Rwandan] colleagues at home, women never talked - never - and I [wondered], 'but why?' But now it is not the same, there [has been] a big change."

- Suzanne Fafin, UNDP⁹³

Nine years after the genocide, Rwanda is still a nascent democracy facing enormous challenges related to mass poverty and illiteracy, an overburdened justice system, internal displacement, insecurity, widespread HIV/AIDS, and deep-rooted trauma borne of genocide. The government's involvement in regional conflicts, checkered record on human rights, and

censorship of dissenting parties lead many to be skeptical of its commitment to genuine democracy. The uncertainty of parliamentary elections in September 2003 will further test Rwanda's ability to consolidate the gains of the transitional period while liberalizing political space to include a variety of actors, parties, and ethnic groups.

While women cannot transform the system alone, they have assumed tremendous responsibility in post-genocide Rwanda and have provided strong models of good governance. The Forum of Women Parliamentarians has, for instance, demonstrated to male colleagues how to form cross-party caucuses and work across lines of division for common goals. Similarly, women's civil society has developed an innovative model of grassroots consultation and partnership with branches of government. The women's councils and women's elections also have been an experiment in democracy and governance. As Chantal Gatama of UNHCR explained, "It was like a test of the whole democratization or decentralization process ... and women have proved [themselves] through these women's councils."⁹⁴

As Rwanda enters a new stage in its transformation, the leadership that women have shown must not be underestimated, despite the obstacles they continue to face. They have entered the political space in unprecedented numbers and in unprecedented ways. They have initiated policies and programs addressing many of the root causes and effects of the genocide. The structures described above were an important starting point, and the new constitution, with its provisions for including women in 30 percent of decision-making positions, has solidified this commitment. This innovative approach to good governance must be supported and resourced, however, or it will collapse.

At the rural level there are practical constraints on women's capacity, including the need for education and basic literacy. As the local women's councils indicate, there is immense potential for leadership among women; however, they require further training and skills building so their participation can expand beyond an elite cadre in Kigali.^y

Despite these shortcomings, there has been a significant change in the public sphere regarding women. As a farm worker in Ruhengeri said, "it has now become clear to men that women govern in a more positive way."⁹⁵ Across the country at all levels, few doubt that women's participation in governance is a pillar of longer-term democratization and sustainable peace. Internationally, this should be acknowledged, encouraged, and promoted.

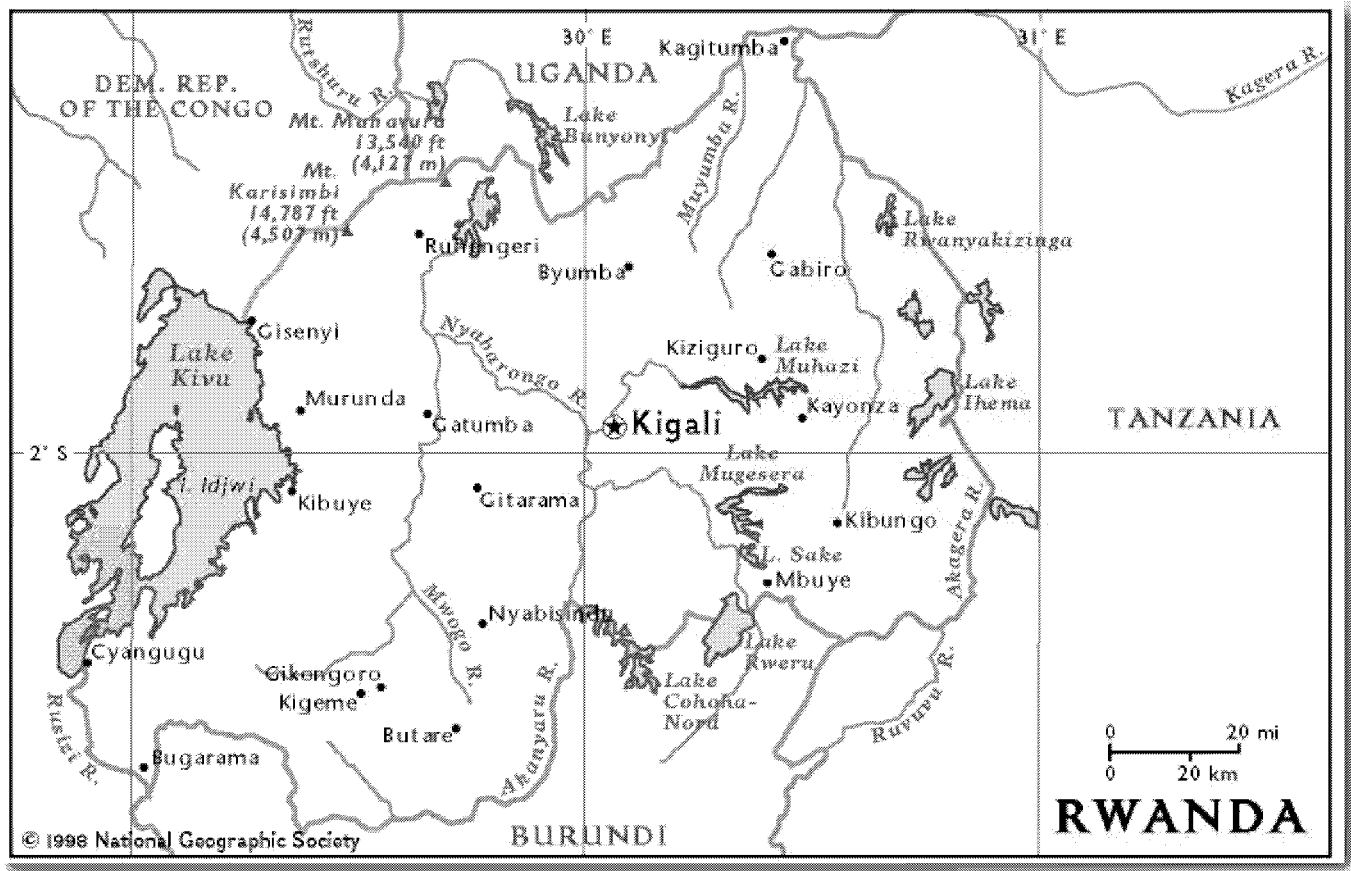
^y At a June 2003 meeting of the Rwandan Women Leaders Caucus, a new NGO that promotes women's participation in governance, those in attendance highlighted the need to train women in rural areas outside Kigali in order to expand the pool of qualified women who could assume leadership posts. External critics have been more explicit about the lack of diversity, claiming that those women who hold national-level posts in government and civil society are, like their male counterparts, predominantly Anglophone Rwandans who previously lived in Uganda or other returnees.

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APPENDIX A: MAP OF RWANDA



APPENDIX B: ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
GNU	Government of National Unity
MDR	Republican Democratic Movement
MIGEPROFE	Ministry of Gender and Women in Development
MRND	National Revolutionary Movement for Development
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NURC	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
PCR	Post-Conflict Reconstruction project
PDC	Centrisemocratic Party
PL	Liberal Party
PSD	Social Democratic Party
PSR	Rwandan Socialist Party
RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army, military wing of the Rwandan Patriotic Front
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
UDPR	Union for Democracy of the Rwandan People
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY OF FRENCH AND KINYARWANDAN TERMS

<i>Ethnie</i>	Ethnicity
<i>Forces Armées Rwandaises</i>	Former Rwandan military
<i>Gacaca</i>	Traditional conflict resolution mechanism (direct translation: “grassy space”)
<i>Genocidaires</i>	Individuals who participated in the genocide
<i>Ingando</i>	Solidarity camps
<i>Interahamwe</i>	Organized militias and mobs responsible for much of the killing during the genocide (direct translation: “those who work together”)
<i>Inyangamugayo</i>	Wise and respected members of the community, persons of integrity
<i>Ubulinganire</i>	Equality
<i>Ubwuzuzanye</i>	Complementarity

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Women Waging Peace, a program of Hunt Alternatives Fund, advocates for the full participation of women in formal and informal peace processes around the world. Over 250 members of the “Waging” network, all demonstrated leaders with varied backgrounds, perspectives, and skills, bring a vast array of expertise to the peace-making process. They have met with over 1000 senior policy shapers to collaborate on fresh, workable solutions to long-standing conflicts.

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The Policy Commission is conducting a series of case studies to document women’s contributions to peace processes across conflict areas worldwide. The studies focus on women’s activities in conflict prevention, pre-negotiation and negotiation, and post-conflict reconstruction—including governance; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; and transitional justice and reconciliation. This body of work is pragmatic and operational, offering suggestions, guidelines, and models to encourage policymakers to include women and gender perspectives in their program designs.

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