

Sustaining Women's Gains in Rwanda:

The Influence of Indigenous Culture
and Post-Genocide Politics

Authored by **Peace Uwineza and Elizabeth Pearson**

Edited by **Elizabeth Powley**

The Institute for **Inclusive Security**

THE INSTITUTE FOR INCLUSIVE SECURITY uses research, training, and advocacy to promote the inclusion of all stakeholders, particularly women, in peace processes. We work with a global network of well over 1,000 women leaders from more than 40 conflict regions. Our research gives policymakers new strategies to drive inclusion by examining tangible contributions of women peace builders. Our training provides leaders the specialized skills and knowledge to direct local, national, and international peace-building. Our advocacy to high-level policymakers promotes change that makes peace processes more broad-based, and thus sustainable.

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

Rwanda Project

Manager

Elizabeth Powley

The Institute for Inclusive Security

Director

Carla Koppell

Hunt Alternatives Fund

President

Ambassador Swanee Hunt

Executive Director

Sarah Gauger

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
About the Authors	4
About the Editor	4
Key Findings	5
Introduction	6
Methodology	7
Terminology	7
<i>Gender</i>	7
<i>Ethnicity</i>	7
Part One: Gender and Women in Rwanda’s History	8
Marriage, Motherhood, and Division of Household Labor	8
Gender Roles in the Public Sphere	11
Part Two: Post-Genocide Promotion of Women	14
Cultural Changes in Post-Genocide Rwanda	14
Drawing on Different Cultural Traditions	15
Culture, History, and Politics	16
Part Three: Sustaining Achievements	18
Keys to Sustaining Women’s Gains	18
<i>Legal Reforms</i>	18
<i>Electoral Structures</i>	18
<i>Forum of Women Parliamentarians</i>	19
<i>Executive Branch Structures</i>	20
<i>Civil Society</i>	20
Fundamental Changes?	21
<i>Obstacles Remain</i>	22
<i>The Next Generation</i>	23
Conclusion	25
Appendix 1: Acronyms	26
Appendix 2: Glossary of French and Kinyarwandan Terms	27
Appendix 3: Bibliography	28
Endnotes	30

Acknowledgements

The authors and editor gratefully acknowledge the contributions and assistance of the following individuals and institutions. Without their support this research and report would not have been possible. In addition to the men and women who agreed to be interviewed for this study and those who pointed us to unpublished sources of written material, we thank: Camille Pampell Conaway, Elvis Gakuba, Antoinette Habinshuti, Allison Huggins, Swanee Hunt, Miki Jacevic, Carla Koppell, Ibrahim Murobafi, Abigail Myers, Shirley Randell, Mark Russell, Jonathan Talbot, Justine Uvuza, Roxane Wilber, and Pro-Femmes, Reseau des Femmes, the Rwandan Forum of Women Parliamentarians, and Hunt Alternatives Fund.

About the Authors

Peace Uwineza is a researcher at the Institute for Research and Dialogue for Peace in Kigali, Rwanda. A Fulbright scholar, she earned her master's degree from George Mason University in Virginia. Peace's research interests include the role of dialogue in resolving protracted conflicts and the role of gender issues and history in the perpetuation of conflict.

Elizabeth Pearson graduated in 2007 with an MPhil in development studies from the University of Oxford. Her dissertation research focused on the relationship between gender and governance in contemporary Rwanda.

About the Editor

Elizabeth Powley directed The Institute for Inclusive Security's Rwanda Project from 2005 to 2007. She holds a master's degree from American University's School of International Service. She has worked since 2001 on issues of gender and governance in Rwanda.

Key Findings

1. In pre-colonial Rwanda, some practices—such as the deep respect for motherhood—protected and promoted women, while others—such as bride price or polygamy—subjugated them.
2. Much of women's advancement in contemporary Rwanda seems to have resulted from exceptional social and political factors in the post-conflict period rather than from indigenous culture.
3. Rwandan policymakers have successfully invoked gender-sensitive aspects of indigenous culture to generate support for new legislation that empowers women.
4. In arguing for reforms to improve women's rights in Rwanda, policymakers have referred to aspects of Rwandan culture that violate women's rights and hinder development.
5. The sustainability of women's advancements and the permanence of a cultural shift depend on national leadership, legal reforms, progressive policies and mandates, institutional mechanisms, and a vibrant women's movement.
6. Rooting modern changes in references to tradition and indigenous culture can effectively promote and justify women's political participation in post-conflict countries.
7. Legal reforms are critical to institutionalizing gains by women in a post-conflict society; they guard against reversals of political will and help reinforce ongoing cultural shifts that reshape gender relations.

Introduction

In 2003, Rwanda elected 48.8 percent women to its lower house of parliament, giving it the world's highest percentage of women in a national legislature. Women achieved this dramatic increase, up from 17.1 percent just a decade earlier, in the aftermath of violent conflict. Five years later, in the first real test of women's gains, the September 2008 parliamentary election powerfully reaffirmed Rwanda's top global ranking for female legislative representation. In that election, women earned 56 percent of seats in the lower house. The combined numbers of women in the lower house and the Senate made Rwanda the first country to have a majority-female legislature.¹ Though women made remarkable gains in 2003, their 2008 success was even more dramatic because it demonstrated that women in Rwanda can sustain their gains from one election cycle to the next.

The success of women parliamentarians in Rwanda has prompted questions about how women achieved such unprecedented levels of political representation. Women's leading role in reconstruction and recovery in the wake of a genocide that left almost a million people dead and irreparably altered countless lives is often cited as a primary reason for the deliberate inclusion of women in the post-genocide political regime. As Rwandans restored their communities and resumed the rituals of daily life immediately after the genocide, they came to see women as necessary participants in the overall reconciliation and rebuilding process.

Rwanda's 2003 constitution mandates 30 percent women's representation at all decision-making levels in government. Innovative mechanisms such as a triple ballot, the establishment of women's councils at every level of government, and the promotion of women as judges in special *gacaca* courts to deal with genocide crimes have institutionalized the mandate. Deliberate campaigns to spread messages of gender empowerment and the value of women's participation in political life have reinforced these structures and laws. In making related public commitments, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has become a leader and major supporter of these broad efforts and has also promoted women candidates within the party and government.

Although women's progress in Rwanda stems largely from post-genocide political decisions, these advances are often framed with reference to pre-colonial practices of gender equality. Many Rwandans interviewed during this research stated that indigenous culture respected and valued women's positions in their families and communities, and allowed women to participate in the country's

political and public sphere. Historical examples of women's involvement in decision-making, such as the existence of female chiefs and the Queen Mother, are often cited as the foundation for the present level of women's political participation.

However, alongside indigenous practices that emphasized women's equality with men and their ability to govern, Rwandan culture also includes aspects of gender relations that were (and often remain) oppressive and patriarchal. Women were expected to defer to men, for example, in decision-making and were discouraged from speaking in public. Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a disturbingly common and often hidden problem. Indeed, as in many societies, some aspects of Rwanda's cultural history promoted gender equality while others testified to profound inequalities between men and women.

Understanding women's success in modern Rwandan politics requires analyzing the framing of gender-sensitive indigenous practices as the foundation of women's post-genocide political participation. This paper explores how history and pre-colonial culture relate to the high levels of Rwandan women's political representation. Analysis of public discourse reveals a deliberate attempt by many politicians—both male and female—to tie recent gains for women to indigenous attitudes about gender. This paper analyzes the extent to which indigenous practices continue to frame discussions of women's equality and explores the utility of drawing on indigenous and historical frameworks to validate and build support for women's empowerment.

Whether Rwandan women can sustain and build upon their recent political achievements remains uncertain. Although the constitution guarantees women's participation in Rwandan political life and the country has made great strides in institutionalizing that participation since the genocide, the reliance on government and ruling party support may prove to be a limitation. Moreover, understanding the reasons for women's rapid advancement in Rwanda holds valuable lessons for generating and sustaining such changes elsewhere, even in very different political and national contexts.

This paper begins with a discussion of various Rwandan cultural practices that either support or undercut gender equality. It then analyzes how actors in contemporary Rwandan politics reference indigenous practices in relation to women's empowerment. Ultimately, this paper contends that modern references to gender-sensitive practices in Rwanda's pre-colonial era aim to generate

support for women's political participation by emphasizing its continuity with traditional culture and, in doing so, defuse opposition. The Rwandan case suggests a strategy available to women and men seeking to promote gender equality in political representation elsewhere. However, the paper also highlights the importance of policies, mechanisms, and institutions that can provide a structural framework for sustaining women's gains. These structures guard against reversals of political will and help reinforce ongoing cultural shifts that are reshaping gender relations in Rwanda.

Methodology

Very little scholarly research exists, particularly in English, on indigenous gender practices in Rwanda and their relevance to women's empowerment. Reports by Belgian colonial authorities to the UN help generate a picture of women's roles in pre-independence cultural traditions. Several petitions and reports written by Rwanda's political actors to the UN Secretary-General in the late 1950s and early 1960s speak to women's involvement in political life during that period. Other written documents include publications and reports by local women's organizations and several international commentaries, news reports, and short articles on gender issues and the work of women parliamentarians in the post-genocide era.

The bulk of this research, however, draws on interviews of scholars of Rwandan history and culture, male and female Rwandan elders in the northern and southern parts of the country, ordinary citizens, and women policymakers. These female policymakers are or have been members of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians; leaders in civil society (particularly leaders of women's organizations such as Pro-Femmes and Réseau des Femmes); and Rwandan women working in international organizations that deal with gender issues.

Historically, gender practices in Rwanda varied by ethnic group, by socioeconomic class, and by region. Thus, this research paid particular attention to diversity in the selection of interview participants. To gain a thorough understanding of indigenous concepts of gender in the north, a traditionally Hutu region of the country, a focus group complemented interviews. Ten participants—two elderly women, two elderly men, two middle-aged women, one middle-aged man, two young girls, and one young man—participated in the 2006 focus group in Musanze District (formerly Ruhengeri Province).

Terminology

*Gender*²

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

Early socialization assigns gender roles to men and women. These roles 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 sociopolitical 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.”³

*Ethnicity*⁴

Ethnicity in Rwanda is a highly politicized and controversial notion. Mandatory identity cards, first issued by the Belgian colonial administration and then by post-independence governments until 1994, listed an individual's *ethnie*. The classification on one's identity card determined access to education, jobs, and civil liberties. During the 1994 genocide, carrying an identity card marked “Tutsi” meant being 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.

Though the Rwandan census does not collect data on ethnicity, various estimates project that the current population is 85 percent Hutu, 14 percent Tutsi, and 1 percent Twa.⁵ These groups share language, religion, and culture. Today, Rwandans are discouraged from identifying themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic group, despite the extent to which the Rwandan psyche reflects such divisions.

Part One: Gender and Women in Rwanda's History

This section explores cultural understandings of gender in Rwandan history as seen through the accounts of interview participants and historical documents. In trying to understand Rwanda's historical gender practices, separating pre-colonial practices from those of the colonial era poses a great challenge: little from the pre-colonial era was documented and much of the history has come down through the oral tradition. Descriptions of these practices provide the foundation for the analysis in this paper's next section, which examines how contemporary Rwandan politics interprets these practices.

Rwandan cultural understandings of gender have historically revolved around division of labor rather than equality between the sexes. According to Professor Paul Rutayisire, "Terms like gender, equality, and human rights are Western-derived concepts that have a basis in the individualistic system and culture of the West. Traditional Rwanda had its own context and value systems which are hard to compare with today's values."⁶ Likewise, the Rwandan National Gender Policy explains indigenous concepts of gender relations as based on principles of "complementarity" rather than equality: "Women's [traditional] roles were accorded proportionate value and considered to be complementary and indispensable."⁷ In other words, Rwandans considered men and women responsible for fulfilling their respective roles and obligations within the family and the community.

Despite the orientation of gender relations in Rwanda toward complementarity rather than equality, tension remains between those aspects of Rwandan culture that promote and those that undermine women's worth. Similarly, while Rwandan culture varied across ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and region, all Rwandan women were both empowered and disempowered by aspects of indigenous culture. Ultimately, the gender practices described in this section demonstrate how traditional Rwandan culture offers resources to support conflicting interpretations of women's worth.

Marriage, Motherhood, and Division of Household Labor

Gender roles in traditional Rwanda were structured around a household division of labor that allowed women substantial autonomy in their roles as child bearers and food producers but preserved male authority over other family affairs. Because their biological capacity to bear

children and their roles as mothers strongly determined women's status, their influence was ultimately captive to cultural interpretations of these capacities. As a result, Rwandan women navigated a cultural space that had the potential to both enhance and suppress their power within the household and family.

Several traditional Rwandan expressions refer to a connection between women's leadership and a strong household. Examples include: *Ukurusha umugore akurusha urugo* or "With a great woman, a great home is assured"; and *umutima w'urugo* or "the heart of a home," which refers to a woman as the source of livelihood for her family. The term *mabuja*, or female boss, which husbands use when referring to their wives to denote respect for someone consulted before making a decision, also evidences a woman's traditional role as family manager. Men, however, remained the ultimate arbiters of most family decisions. As Réseau des Femmes, a women's civil society organization, notes, "Rwandan tradition holds that, as the chief of the household, the man is respected by all members of the family. Important decisions are therefore made by him, even if he sometimes consults his wife before making them."⁸

Importantly, gender roles in the home differed according to the social status and material wealth of the family. In the words of one older gentleman: "In the rich homesteads, women reflected high levels of management and control of family affairs. Men actually never entered the backyard, and a man who tried to know what went on there was considered greedy, uncultured, and unmanly."⁹ The wealthier certain men became, the less time they had to control family affairs as they sought to demonstrate their allegiance to the king (or others with political status) in order to secure protection for property and promotion of their own social status. Thus, their wives had significant autonomy and control over the family property, household workers, and children.

According to a 1959 Belgian government report to the UN Secretary-General, which included a section on the condition of women in Rwanda, wealthy women's limited public roles belied a substantial amount of private authority:

Despite this relative seclusion, their husbands readily [transferred], during [their] trips to the court or on war expeditions, the management of the family [to their wives]

... which the women administered with clear intelligence and wise sense, receiving beggars, commanding servants, entertaining clients, receiving tributes.¹⁰

These women also maintained personal property, such as cows, that they could use to acquire friends and a loyal, grateful clientele. An expert noted: "As [they] climbed the social ladder, women's value increased, as opposed to women in the lower-class levels."¹¹

In poor families, wives still controlled internal family issues, such as the use of farm proceeds, but men more closely oversaw and managed the family property, leaving women with less control over household decision-making. Men in poor homesteads took part in direct production of the family's wealth. While this meant that men assumed more control over property, it also often resulted in a more equitable division of household labor, with men going to gardens with their wives, assuming the most difficult farming roles, and tending to livestock.

Traditionally, Rwandan women were not permitted to own land.¹² If a male head of household died, property passed to male heirs or to the man's brothers. In the case of divorce or the husband's death, a woman had no claim over the family property if she had not borne children; she would quietly return to her family of origin or marry into another family. Women with children were required to marry a brother of the deceased in order to retain their status as members of their marital family.

Women may have influenced day-to-day decisions regarding the management of land, but they had little ability to direct larger decisions regarding the sale or lease of property. Because men were thought to make occasionally abrupt, irrational decisions, cultural norms urged men to consult their wives before finalizing any sale or gift. One expert stated, "Women decided who gets a cow from the family. Even giving cows to children required that the wife be consulted first. When the family bull was to be given (lent) to a neighbor or friend for the purpose of mating, the woman had to give her consent first. In the cultural sense, women were heads of their families."¹³ However, such gestures were more formality than requirement; a woman's failure to consent to such matters did not prevent a man's action. Cultural prohibitions against making family matters public prevented women from disputing land ownership, a problem which continues today, despite the 1999 law establishing women's right to inherit and own land.¹⁴

Household gender roles also varied by region. Some interviewees referenced a perception that women in the central and southern parts of the country were treated with greater gentleness. Women were not meant to perform hard chores such as building houses or collecting firewood and water, and they did not work alone in their gardens; rather, they always worked hand in hand with their husbands, especially in poor households. Men were responsible for more physically demanding tasks, such as clearing the bush and the initial tilling of the land, while the women did the less labor-intensive tasks of planting, weeding, and harvesting the crops. To some, this protective tendency signifies that women were treated as the weaker sex and seen as unable to manage hard tasks. But to others, this division of labor demonstrated respect, and a man whose wife engaged in hard chores was viewed as an irresponsible husband.

Geographic differences did not align with ethnicity in Rwanda; Hutu and Tutsi did not occupy separate geographic regions. Throughout the country, neighbors of different ethnicities lived in communities, though the northern part of the country was predominantly or historically Hutu, while the more mixed south had some predominantly Tutsi areas.

Ethnic divisions did, nonetheless, underlie socioeconomic and regional differences in colonial Rwanda; wealthier Tutsi families were connected to the court while the majority Hutu population was consigned to poverty. Of course, not all Tutsi families were rich, and socioeconomic status was by no means a perfect proxy for ethnicity. Even so, ethnicity to an important degree determined women's experiences in colonial Rwanda. For the colonial Belgians, who focused acutely on ethnic difference, the situations of Hutu and Tutsi women contrasted starkly:

In the bosom of customary society, very different conditions of life were assigned to Tutsi women on the one hand and Hutu on the other. The first, according to their rank, were exempted from all rough work. Obligated into idleness, they only appeared in public as little as possible and remitted to their servants the duties of daily household tasks. They lived in accommodations more spacious and comfortable than the common people, occupying their leisure with wickerwork, with long conversations with their followers or visitors.¹⁵

Ethnicity and economic status are important forms of social difference and highlight ways in which cultural gender practices did not affect all women identically. Likewise, wealth or social rank gave women access to certain privileges, but did not necessarily translate into all forms of authority. For instance, while some Tutsi women may have used their access to property to exercise influence, they may not have enjoyed similar access to public decision-making processes.

Rwandan culture placed great importance on marriage, and married women and men were given special respect and recognition in society. As with other cultural practices, marriage, in some ways, recognized and respected women's independence and, in other ways, subordinated women within a patriarchal system of authority. In the days preceding a wedding, for instance, aunts and other elderly women counseled a bride on the duties of marriage. This advice generally focused on the woman's responsibility to respect her husband and his family and emphasized her obligation to be subservient to her husband. Married women were no longer permitted to act as girls, climbing trees or milking cows. In the northern region, though, where the *inkwano* (bride price) could be exorbitant, a woman was also expected to recover the cost incurred by her husband in paying her family to legalize a marriage. The husband provided a combination of sheep, goats, cows, hoes, pots, local beer, and money; the wife was then expected to labor as compensation to her husband.

On the other hand, a Rwandan bridegroom was required to leave his family and live with his bride in her family's homestead during the first days of marriage. This practice, known as *gutahira*, was intended to help the girl adjust to her husband before she made the transition to his home and assumed the responsibilities of wife and mother. It also provided an opportunity for the bride's family to evaluate the capacity of their new son-in-law to care for their daughter. During his stay at the bride's home, the bride's family required the groom to work, take part in all male chores, and display a high level of discipline. If he did anything considered offensive, he could lose his wife and be sent home in disgrace. Not much is known about the frequency with which this practice was employed in pre-colonial Rwanda, or how often families sent young men home. The stories persist, however, as cautionary tales.¹⁶

After marriage, a bride belonged not only to her husband, but also to his entire extended family. Traditional prac-

tices emphasized the new wife's subordinate status. For example, a married woman could not speak the names of her in-laws or her husband's uncles and aunts out of reverence.¹⁷ Known as *gutsinda*, this practice even required brides to devise new words for words that sounded similar to the names of her husband's parents, uncles, and aunts. If her mother-in-law was named Victoria, for instance, a bride would avoid using that name but also the word "victory." In addition, a bride was encouraged to accept sexual relationships with her brothers-in-law.¹⁸ If she or her husband refused, the family could reject the bride. The family would remind the groom that his wife belonged to the family, and that he had an obligation to share her. Not all women objected to this practice; some elderly interviewees felt that it gave women some liberty in choosing and exploring other sexual partners.¹⁹

While Rwandan law now prohibits polygamy, it remains acceptable in some regions and continues to be widespread, particularly in the northern part of the country. Traditionally, only relatively wealthy men could marry a second wife, as Rwandan culture held that two wives could not live together without tension and conflict. Particularly in the south, a new wife arrived with expectations that a husband would acquire another plot of land, herds of cattle, and a new home. Women in these well-to-do polygamous marriages tended to have the most independence, controlling the cows, the house, and the land for cultivation. In such households, wives took full control over internal affairs, managing resources, deciding how to make use of farm and livestock proceeds, and overseeing workers and children.

Modern polygamous practices occur in a context of poverty, often involve wives living together in one household, and frequently are a man's attempt to increase labor and acquire property. Women have a duty to produce food and other commodities in order to sell them for additional property and livestock, while men tend to act as supervisors and regulators of women's labor. Women produce wealth, but have little control over the proceeds. Women's heavy workload and the toll of bearing children often lead men into a second marriage to secure support for the first wife—sometimes at her request. Focus group participants noted that women in wealthier families enjoy more freedom than those in poorer families because they can hire the poor to assist them.

Historically, Rwandan society placed a high value on children as an assurance of family continuity and strength. As the bearers and caretakers of children, women were

thereby given a high level of respect and recognition. According to an assessment of Rwandan culture by Belgian colonial authorities:

One also easily perceives the importance and the majesty accorded to women in this country in their role as the bearers of life, the fertility of the race. One witnesses the great respect given to a woman, especially if she is the mother of a number of children.²⁰

Social taboos and traditions arose to reinforce respect for motherhood and to protect women and children from danger or abuse. The word *umubyeyi*—or “mother”—also has connotations of “creator” and “life giver.” Her family and in-laws would pamper and exempt a woman from certain chores during pregnancy and immediately after delivery of a child. On some occasions, chiefs would punish men who did not conform to these expectations. In poor communities, neighbors guaranteed a steady supply of milk to a woman who delivered a baby. One Rwandan woman in her sixties described society’s respect for women in this way: “While traveling with a child, a woman never had to carry milk for the baby as any home she approached along the way welcomed her and provided her with milk for the child, and for herself.”²¹

It is not surprising, given the level of respect for motherhood and fertility, that a woman unable to bear children lost the respect of family and the wider community.²² A common Rwandan curse, considered the worst of all insults, is *Uragapfa utabyaye*, or “May you die childless.” When a couple failed to bear children, the woman was blamed first, and the husband would leave his wife to remarry and bear children. If he eventually proved himself unable to bear children, however, a man would face even greater ostracization; some interviewees noted that the practice of wife-sharing among male family members was a way to prevent clear identification of male infertility.

Men could also acceptably divorce their wives or take second wives if their first wives bore only daughters. Women who did not produce male children were considered a threat to the continuity and perpetuation of the family. The preference for male first-born children, considered essential “to have an heir of the family assets, to benefit from assistance in old [age], to perpetuate the clan, and to ensure family protection,” continues today.²³

Rwandans considered pre-marital pregnancy an abomination whether it resulted from a consensual relationship or rape. “Rwandan society considered women who committed adultery and young, single mothers as outcasts [...] Single mothers who were victims of rape were forced to get married to their rapists or to be deported to a very remote place.”²⁴ In contrast, a man who impregnated a young girl escaped punishment. One of the interviewees for this paper concurred, noting: “In the pre-colonial period, girls who got pre-marital pregnancies were excommunicated and banished. In the well-to-do families, such girls would be forcefully married off to any man who was willing to have them, mostly of a lower family and economic status.”²⁵

An examination of women’s traditional household roles in indigenous Rwandan culture does not clearly lead to categorical conclusions regarding women’s contemporary empowerment. Certain aspects of traditional culture celebrated women’s worth and their leadership managing family affairs, while other aspects unambiguously asserted men’s authority over household decision-making. Whether traditional Rwandan culture structured gender relations as equal or complementary does not answer the question of whether it fundamentally honored women or subjugated them. In fact, both appear to have been true; the culture carried competing messages about women’s worth and about women’s relationship to men. While some indigenous practices could act as cultural resources to support women’s leadership in contemporary Rwandan politics, few automatic or direct connections exist between women’s household roles in traditional Rwandan society and their political leadership today.

Gender Roles in the Public Sphere

Women’s public roles in traditional Rwandan culture perhaps provide the more relevant context for evaluating the extent to which indigenous gender practices underlie women’s modern political achievements. As with women’s household roles, however, accounts from interview participants and available literature present conflicting attitudes regarding women’s place in traditional politics. In some ways, women’s leadership and participation in public life were respected and solicited, but they were often also rejected or feared.

Although Rwandan culture is sometimes celebrated as exceptional among African cultures for promoting wom-

en's influence in the public sphere, in many cases women were expected to defer to men or to wield influence indirectly through their husbands. Traditionally, women did not speak publicly, especially in the presence of men. A woman who dared challenge men in public was considered insolent. In interviews, many elders—who continuously referenced Rwandan traditional culture's respect for women—contended that the major limitation on women was lack of freedom to express themselves in public.

Women were not allowed to participate directly in public deliberations; rather, they were expected to play an indirect role in the customary system of justice, known as *gacaca*. Through their personal networks, women would lobby their husbands and influence court decisions by proxy. Women's absence from public proceedings such as *gacaca* court hearings is evidenced by the word for witness, *umugabo*, which translated literally means "a man." Only recently did the term for witness change from *umugabo* to *umuhamba* in order to make the term gender-neutral and formally include women witnesses. Further, with *gacaca* courts revived in recent years and adapted to deal with genocide crimes, at least 30 percent of judges in modern *gacaca* courts are women.

Men in the royal family and their close associates dominated most leadership roles, but some women held high-level political positions. The Queen Mother, for example, co-ruled the nation with power and autonomy equal to that of her son, the king. A king was never enthroned alone; he became ruler with his mother as co-ruler of the people. Female chiefs, who at times inherited their leadership roles from their husbands or brothers, were not uncommon;²⁶ these women managed to transcend some gender norms.

The history of Rwanda also includes tales of female chiefs and queen mothers who ruled ruthlessly. Most notable among these is Kanjogera, known by the royal name Nyirayuhi. Divisive history taught in Rwandan schools during the first and second republics emphasized Nyirayuhi's inhuman acts; she is said to have used Hutus to support her spear, which she would plow into her servants' feet as she rose up from her royal seat. Even official documents written during the first and second republics

perpetuated the same negative views, including one quotation that can be translated as: "The Queen Mother also had the power to kill. Like Nyirayuhi, who had a sword named 'ruhuga.' Whenever she said that 'ruhuga is thirsty,' a healthy baby would be brought in, fed with milk and then put before the Queen Mother, who would then place her sword on the baby's tummy to support herself as she got up."²⁷

Critics of these tales dispute their accuracy and characterize them as exaggerated myths, saying that members of the royal family would have more likely ordered others to carry out political executions. Even so, Rwandans remember Kanjogera as a merciless leader who casually ordered the death of many of her subjects. With formidable authority and notorious interventions—including a coup d'état that placed her son on the throne—the name "Kanjogera" has become synonymous with a woman who wields terrible power and possesses the real authority behind the public face of a male leader.²⁸ Significantly, then, "the dominant image of female political leadership to emerge from the pre-colonial period is therefore that of treacherous and illegitimate authority."²⁹

Contemporary portrayals of a female leader as "a Kanjogera" exploit the cultural associations of women politicians with ruthlessness and cruelty. Certain traditional Kinyarwanda sayings also draw connections between women leaders and violence. The saying "*Urvuuzze umugore ruvuga umuboro*" can be loosely translated as, "A home with a vocal or assertive woman results in nothing but bloodshed." During the late twentieth century, the nickname "Kanjogera" was given to the wife of President Habyarimana; it was she, along with her powerful family, who was said to wield the real power behind his leadership. Other examples where Rwandan cultural myths and traditions portray women's political influence as powerful but dangerous include the cultural belief that women can stop a snake from biting or that women can take away an ability to resurrect the dead. In Rwandan culture, these myths portray women as a group to fear, particularly if they hold positions of power. This differs, however, from the image of women's leadership used today to promote and justify women's recent gains. In fact, other, positive parts of the culture are emphasized.

Gender-Based Violence

Some historical traditions in Rwandan culture emphasized the special protections accorded to women and children and the social taboos against abuse and gender-based violence. For instance, on his wedding day, the groom was reminded to handle his bride with great care—or risk a divorce. A family with a member known to have beaten his wife would find itself unable to secure another bride. An elder in Kigali City stated, “Such a family was shunned and branded names. Local musicians and poets would create songs and poems to satirize such an individual and his family. Those who beat their wives were brought before family courts (gacaca) and reprimanded.”³⁰ Beating a wife more than once provided grounds for divorce, which the woman’s family generally supported, although children would remain with the husband’s family.

At the same time, traditional Rwandan society tolerated domestic violence, which remains a significant problem today. Rwandans consider sexual violence a private matter and subject to a culture of silence in which women do not speak out about their experiences. Men are understood to have the right to insist on sex with their wives, and women cannot legitimately refuse. Women are also at the mercy of their husbands’ families. It is considered virtuous for women to silently tolerate all forms of mistreatment so long as their lives are not threatened.

Women’s experiences during the 1994 genocide powerfully and disturbingly illustrate the gendered shape that violence can assume. UN investigators estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 Rwandan women were raped during the genocide, and collections of survivors’ testimonies paint a horrific picture of multiple forms of gender-based violence. Ten years after the genocide, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROFE) revealed in a 2004 study that, over the preceding five years, one in three women in Rwanda had suffered physical or verbal abuse in her community and that, in the previous year, half of all women had experienced an act of domestic violence.³¹ Violence against women, while perhaps formally taboo, was and remains widespread and culturally supported.

Until 2006, when women parliamentarians began to develop landmark GBV legislation, Rwandan law did not specifically address rape or sexual assault. Although the Rwandan Penal Code prohibits rape and sexual torture, it did not provide legal definitions of these acts, allowing for judicial discretion, often to the detriment of women who brought forward accusations of sexual assault. Prior to 2006, women policymakers pushed for the passage of several key pieces of gender-based violence legislation. For example, the transitional parliament passed a law in 2001 criminalizing child rape. During the same year, also due to the efforts of women activists and parliamentarians, the crime of rape was elevated to the highest category of genocide-related crimes. A 2004 law concerning changes to the gacaca system—the community-based courts where the majority of genocide crimes are prosecuted—contained provisions to protect the rights of sexual violence survivors, including allowing women to testify in closed sessions.

In their work to establish legal prohibitions against gender-based violence and change social norms of silence, women parliamentarians have repeatedly invoked indigenous values to emphasize that Rwandan culture does not support violence against women and children. In her opening speech to the Chamber of Deputies when she presented the GBV bill, FFRP President Judith Kanakuzwe argued that the law called for a revival of cultural values that protected all members of the community. True Rwandan culture, she claimed, respected women’s rights and did not tolerate gender-based crimes.³² Such statements by women parliamentarians and advocates appeal to idealized and aspirational concepts of Rwandan culture and helped enlist new allies in support of GBV legislation who might otherwise oppose what many perceive to be a radical law. By allowing supporters of the law to stand on the side of cultural values, the women’s caucus presented a compelling political argument.

Seeking to advance legislation during times of dramatic cultural change—such as Rwanda in the post-genocide era—can be particularly effective; it helps root the legal protection of women in a cultural heritage. While that heritage may be somewhat constructed, appealing to cultural traditions of respecting women can build support for change and shore up the sustainability and acceptability of social reforms.

Part Two: Post-Genocide Promotion of Women

This section describes the various ways that culture is referenced in relation to women's political participation in Rwanda. These cases provide valuable examples for understanding the role that culture plays in contemporary Rwandan politics, particularly in discussions of gender relations. Policymakers—often, but not exclusively, women parliamentarians themselves—frequently use references to cultural traditions as strategic arguments to build support for certain political reforms. Many describe post-genocide initiatives as revivals of positive indigenous traditions repressed first by colonial customs and later by divisive ideologies that culminated in the genocide. Citations of the indigenous roots of contemporary policy fit into a larger pattern of how Rwandan politics frame post-genocide gender reforms.

Cultural Changes in Post-Genocide Rwanda

Worldwide, cultural attitudes about gender relations powerfully determine women's opportunities, including the potential for participation in politics. Research shows that attitudes toward gender equality rank as some of the most important variables—surpassing even the type of electoral system and the number of parties—in determining the level of women's legislative participation.³³ Attempts to explain Rwanda's historic proportion of female parliamentarians without reference to culture overlook important consideration affecting perceptions of women's leadership in post-genocide Rwanda.

Research shows that particularly in new democracies, dramatic increases in women's representation in parliament often follow periods of conflict that disrupt prevailing gender norms and thrust women into new roles. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda all saw large jumps in women's representation during political transitions following conflict.³⁴ In comparing the experiences of African countries with high levels of women in formal politics, scholars Gretchen Bauer and Hannah Britton note that “it appears that disruptions to gender relations caused by prolonged conflict may actually offer opportunities for reconfiguring those relations in the postconflict period.”³⁵

In the case of Rwanda, both post-independence violence and the formation of the RPF in exile in Uganda have shaped the relationships among conflict, culture, and women's political participation. Colonial rule in Rwanda began in the late 1800s and continued until social revo-

lution in the 1950s, culminating with independence in 1962, when a Hutu republic replaced the colonial-supported Tutsi elite. Revolutionary struggles in Rwanda involved waves of persecution and violence by the Hutu against Tutsi chiefs and members of the royal court, driving many Tutsi (and even some Hutu) into exile. Some exiles organized militarily, beginning a 30-year period of sporadic invasions into Rwanda from neighboring countries, resulting in Hutu-led campaigns of repression against Tutsis living in Rwanda. These periodically violent repressions in turn provoked waves of Tutsis to flee the country in 1964 and again in 1972. In 1987, a group of Rwandan exiles who had helped elevate Yoweri Museveni to power in Uganda founded the RPF there.

The experience of exiled Rwandan Tutsis illustrates how periods of conflict can lead to shifts in traditional gender roles. Violence in Rwanda targeted primarily Tutsi men, whose death or flight left behind women and children. Women—married and widowed—were forced to adapt to difficult conditions by becoming farmers, tilling their land and growing food to sustain their families. An entire generation of exiled Tutsi Rwandans therefore grew accustomed to female-headed households and witnessed mothers, on their own, raising children. This generation later assumed power in post-conflict Rwanda and voiced an appreciation for women's capabilities and recognition of the importance of women's empowerment. John Mutamba, former representative of the Ministry of Gender Affairs, states: “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.”³⁶

Whether or not experience as a minority political voice defined the RPF's governing philosophy, Rwanda's deliberate inclusion of women in post-conflict governance certainly mirrors a pattern in other Sub-Saharan African governments. While in exile, RPF members in Uganda experienced that country's use of a quota system to increase women's voice in government. An analyst noted: “The policy of inclusion owes much to the RPF's exposure to gender equality issues in Uganda, where members spent many years in exile.”³⁷ Only days before the Rwandan genocide began in April 1994, women won 26 percents of the seats in parliament through South Africa's first democratic elections. Mozambique held elections in 1994 that resulted in the substantial presence of women in the national legislature. Radical shifts in gender relations occurred during revolutionary struggles and post-independence conflicts that translated into spikes in women's legislative participation.

In addition to the RPF experience in exile, the genocide itself forced shifts in gender roles. With so many widowed—survivors who had lost their husbands and the wives of genocide suspects, who were de facto widows because their husbands fled or were imprisoned—women had newfound responsibilities. The genocide thrust women into new roles; they took the lead in restoring communities, often in an effort to meet the basic needs of their children and other survivors. One interview participant noted, “After the genocide, women realized that there were no men to care for them, and they immediately discarded cultural taboos like ‘women cannot build a house, climb a tree, or talk in public.’ It is such drastic changes that helped women awaken to their new challenges and empowered them in ways that surprised even the women themselves.”³⁸

Drawing on Different Cultural Traditions

A complex relationship between culture and women’s political participation exists in Rwanda, where government officials and civil society leaders draw on negative and positive aspects of Rwandan culture to promote gender-equality reforms.

Male and female policymakers are quick to acknowledge that many aspects of traditional Rwandan culture repress women and abrogate their human rights. The Forum of Women Parliamentarians (FFRP) has explicitly viewed its legislative work on gender issues as a necessary response that women policymakers in particular can use to address persistent violations of women’s rights often supported by a “culture of silence.” A female civil society leader explained the relationship this way:

[I]t was about our culture. Because in our culture they say it is the right of the husband to beat his wife. If we hear someone is beating his wife, we say, “Ah, he is correcting his wife; it is no matter to intervene.” [. . .] Because there were no women in decision-making, there were no women in parliament, there were no women in government, there were no women. And only men made those laws. And because they are aware of the attitude towards women, they didn’t need to provide the provisions to punish domestic violence.³⁹

With women in the post-genocide parliament, women’s advocates in civil society felt they had allies who would address issues previously regarded as cultural traditions rather than as problems deserving policy intervention.

Rather than ignore cultural traditions that might work against continued social and economic empowerment, women leaders in Rwanda have consistently cited aspects of Rwandan culture that they view as barriers. Women parliamentarians have called attention to a variety of traditions supporting male privilege (from polygamy to inheritance laws), contrasting what they portray as repressive and outdated with new standards of gender equality, exemplified by their own political presence. Women leaders have presented gender equality as a development strategy intended to help the whole family and society; for instance, they have emphasized that when women earn an income outside the home, the living standard of the entire family rises. These arguments have particularly targeted men and have often attempted to make men feel invested in uplifting their wives. Women’s groups urge men to treat their wives and female relatives as equals, and to encourage them to attend meetings, receive training, and return to school.

At the same time, policymakers in Rwanda have used selected aspects of Rwandan culture as positive resources to emphasize the benefits of women’s leadership. The cultural belief that women naturally make peace and seek to resist and prevent violence has resonated particularly well in post-genocide Rwanda. When asked about factors contributing to women’s unprecedented political involvement, Rwandans will sometimes refer to women’s traditional influence in preventing men from waging what women considered unnecessary wars. According to cultural tradition, women would remove the strings or belt that tied their clothes around their waists (*umweko*), place it in their husbands’ way, then dare them to cross over it. If a man crossed such a string and went to war, it was believed that he would die in battle. Such a method was deemed effective at deterring husbands, brothers, and male friends from going to war.

This tradition of women as peacemakers is frequently invoked in relation to women’s role in rebuilding Rwandan society. The reference to a positive cultural view of women—as not only peaceful but also as influential in deterring violence—has endured even in the aftermath of a genocide that women could not prevent, powerfully underscoring the widely held perception that women are less prone than men to violence. Women have been cred-

ited with convincing their husbands, brothers, and sons to abandon the insurgency that followed the genocide and to return to Rwanda to surrender to the new government.⁴⁰ Stories of the widows of genocide victims working together with the wives of imprisoned *genocidaires* to sustain communities reeling from violence are also commonly cited by Rwandan leaders as examples of women's peaceful leadership style. Many voice the belief that women's leadership will insulate the country from future conflict in a way that male dominance of governance did not. Although other cultural beliefs related to the evils of women's political participation seem to undercut perceptions of women as peacemakers, the idea that women are less warlike and would have prevented genocide if pre-genocide politics had better involved them has helped generate popular support for women parliamentarians. Women also claim that their initiatives revitalize pre-colonial Rwandan culture in ways that move beyond outdated traditions. In doing so, they legitimize contemporary reforms by linking them to a particular Rwandan historical narrative and an idealized past.

Women policymakers too have used culture to their advantage in supporting specific gender equality reforms. During parliamentary debate over GBV legislation, some male parliamentarians grumbled that Rwanda should not have to abandon elements of its culture when other African countries had not been forced to do so.⁴¹ They also criticized the FFRP's citation of UNIFEM statistics on GBV, arguing that Rwanda needed a home-grown assessment of GBV. These arguments reflect a resistance to changes perceived as Western-imposed modernization. In response, the women repeatedly called upon their fellow parliamentarians to separate good cultural traditions from bad ones and to build upon positive traditions by passing a law that would define and punish GBV. In her opening speech to the Chamber of Deputies, FFRP President Judith Kanakuze stated that the GBV bill would revive cultural values that protected people. She argued that gender-based violence, despite its prevalence and the appeal to culture made by those who resisted laws against it, was a violation of true Rwandan ethics and values.⁴² By insisting that Rwandan culture is rooted in values that support women's rights, women parliamentarians—and their male allies—explicitly and successfully used cultural arguments to build a constituency around a modern political reform. Rather than focusing on dramatic cultural shifts that enabled women's political participation and highlighted the need for change, the women leaders argued that a continuity of cultural tradition supported their efforts.

This approach complements the government's overall strategy of promoting women's empowerment as a development goal and political strategy. President Paul Kagame himself leads this effort at the highest levels; in his speeches, he calls on men and women to be "true partners and beneficiaries" and notes that "good governance, good economic management, and respect of human rights" require gender equality.⁴³ Kagame maintains that women's lack of power is rooted in financial imbalances, educational inequalities, and discriminatory laws and practices. During a speech to delegates at an international conference celebrating the tenth anniversary of the women's caucus in parliament, he stated:

The question you have to ponder is simply this: How does a society hope to transform itself if it shoots itself in the foot by squandering more than half of its capital investment? The truth of the matter is that societies that recognize the real and untapped socioeconomic, cultural, and political power of women thrive. Those that refuse to value and leverage women's talent, energies, and unique skills remain developmental misfits. It is not difficult to demonstrate this with a growing body of evidence.⁴⁴

Linking social progress and successful economic development to a broad recognition of women's worth exemplifies the RPF message that pragmatism demands rejection of cultural practices that repress women. Kagame makes it clear that, from a cost-benefit framework, having women as men's equal partners in development efforts makes sense. It is simply inefficient to let patriarchal cultural beliefs stand in the way of efforts to improve quality of life.

Culture, History, and Politics

Women leaders help to define Rwanda's national identity in relation to its history and traditions by linking the contemporary movement for gender equality to cultural precedents. Rwanda, of course, does not distinguish itself by having close ties among its history, culture, and politics. All over the world, historical narratives and cultural traditions play key roles in creating national identity. Political debates and policy decisions, unsurprisingly, often reference and continually reinterpret these narratives and traditions. However, the devastating events in Rwanda's recent past, and ongoing efforts to understand

the historical context in which genocide took place, particularly underscore the political significance of history for a country engaged in a long process of rebuilding and reconciliation.

Various scholars have emphasized the important role that historical narrative plays in contemporary Rwandan politics and the need to examine exactly how history functions as a political concept. Johan Pottier, for instance, argues that the ruling RPF party deploys certain interpretations of Rwandan history and the genocide to justify the forms of political authority exercised by the government.⁴⁵ According to Pottier, policy directives fit into this state-generated narrative and, in doing so, construct a “discourse of reform” that “acts as an instrument which, through its representation of the past, helps to legitimate the present.”⁴⁶ Similarly, Nigel Eltringham explores how Rwandan society’s need to understand how genocide could have taken place can lead to selective interpretation of past events in support of certain interpretations of the present.⁴⁷

Both Pottier and Eltringham remark on how modern political rhetoric in Rwanda contrasts a peaceful pre-colonial era with the division and violence that followed colonial rule and independence. References to indigenous gender practices supportive of women’s empowerment often also include mention of colonialism’s disruptive role. According to this interpretation, many of the patriarchal aspects of modern gender relations can be attributed to Belgian colonial rule. Belgian colonialists introduced Christianity to Rwanda; its adoption put an end to women’s traditional roles in indigenous religion and made divorce unacceptable, for example. At first, Belgian schools were religious institutions that only admitted boys. In 1940, though, the first school to admit girls was established to educate female teachers as they trained to become nuns. By the early 1950s, other girls’ schools trained nurses or midwives or prepared women for marriage to the male elite by teaching them basic hygiene, cooking, and knitting. Colonial rulers also actively sought to end the practice of polygamy, but were largely unsuccessful and, in

some cases, actually exacerbated women’s exploitation. According to Professor Mbonimana, “In the 1940s the Belgians imposed a tax on second wives as a way of discouraging polygamy, which was widespread in the north. The result was more work for the women, as a man would marry a second wife and require her to work extra for the imposed tax.”⁴⁸

Blaming only colonial rulers for patriarchal cultural practices may not accurately reflect history. Competing strands in indigenous Rwandan culture that respectively empowered and repressed women’s participation in public and private decision-making suggest that both Rwandans and Belgians perpetuated patriarchy. Regardless, references to unequal gender relations as a colonial construct have eased the passage of contemporary reforms by characterizing the reforms as a return to an indigenous structure. For instance, during debate over gender-based violence legislation, one of the bill’s sponsors argued that discussions over culture should separate out its good and bad aspects.⁴⁹ He asserted that all discrimination, including gender discrimination, began with colonialism and male-only education. Paired with statements by other proponents of the GBV bill about the Rwandan tradition of valuing women, the references to colonialism have been partly strategic. If colonialism introduced patriarchy to Rwandan culture, then new legislation fighting gender-based violence is a welcome return to past tradition rather than a threatening change associated with Western influence.

While post-conflict cultural shifts have undoubtedly benefitted them, women policymakers continue to navigate a complex political terrain where culture both enables and inhibits aspects of their leadership. As in pre-colonial Rwanda, competing interpretations of cultural values regarding gender continue to shape women’s lives. The sustainability of women’s gains in Rwanda will partly depend on the ability of women leaders and the ruling party to marshal support for female leadership by appealing to some indigenous cultural traditions while casting others aside as outmoded.

Part Three: Sustaining Achievements

Women increased their representation in parliament to 56 percent in the 2008 election, the first test of the country's status as a leader in women's representation. Rwandans and non-Rwandans alike speculate whether present advancements in gender equality and women's empowerment will be sustained. As legal and structural reforms are dependent on endorsement by the current government, progress may or may not endure beyond this administration. Immaculee Ingabire, a women's activist in Rwanda, contends that male resistance could conceivably halt or reverse women's progress if government support waned.⁵⁰ Structural changes, however, may have occurred in the political and social landscape that will permit the gains to endure with or without the government's backing.

Keys to Sustaining Women's Gains

Evidence indicates that, while they have made significant strides in cementing political leadership and helping institute new cultural norms of gender equality, women in Rwanda face ongoing challenges that could undermine their successes. In particular, institutional structures and the activism of women parliamentarians and their partners in civil society are crucial to consolidating gains to-date and providing a foundation for women's future opportunities for leadership. These institutions, particularly the constitutionally mandated quota, guard against reversals of women's gains. At the same time, the most important function of such institutions is arguably that they help fundamentally alter the cultural climate by normalizing women's presence in political life.

Legal Reforms

The 2003 constitution is a critical tool for sustaining women's participation in politics; it legally protects women's right to participation in decision-making positions at all levels of government. As the foundation of the post-genocide legal system, the constitution mandates a minimum of 30 percent representation of women at all decision-making levels (e.g., local government, parliament, cabinet). The preamble to the constitution formally states the country's commitment to the rights of both women and men and to "ensuring equal rights between Rwandans and between women and men without prejudice to the principles of gender equality and complementarity in national development."⁵¹ Rwanda has also ratified key international protocols on women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

The development of various laws that increase and protect women's rights in Rwanda have reinforced constitutional and international commitments. For example, in 1999, the transitional parliament granted women the right to inherit property for the first time in the country's history. Because property includes land—which forms the basis for survival in Rwanda—this provision was a critical step forward for women.⁵² Also during the transitional parliament, women parliamentarians pushed for the passage of a 2001 law that criminalized child rape. In 2009, the gender-based violence legislation became law. This law takes steps to clarify the vague definition of rape that existed in the criminal code and establishes specific penalties for violence against women. By revising existing laws, lawmakers have codified women's rights in the Rwandan legal system.

These legal reforms provide a foundation to end harmful and discriminatory practices. The government, however, must implement and enforce the reforms. Propagation of the reforms can leverage public awareness-raising efforts, foster open debate in the media, and lead to training on exercising and protecting women's legal rights. As experts note, legal achievements cannot rely entirely on the government for enforcement. For laws to persist, they must be rooted in social value systems since they derive their effectiveness from the will and consent of the people.

Electoral Structures

Electoral systems, and, in particular, the "triple balloting" system that guarantees the election of women to a specified percentage of seats at the local level, have played essential roles in realizing commitments made in the Rwandan constitution. First introduced during the 2001 sector and district elections, and used again in the 2006 district election, the system presents each voter with three ballots for the local election: a general ballot, a women's ballot, and a youth ballot. In each sector, voters select one person from each ballot, thus picking a general candidate (frequently, but not necessarily, a man), a woman, and a young person. Through a subsequent indirect election, voters choose a district council from candidates who win at the sector level. From that group, the district mayor and other executive committee officials are selected. This process provides new space for women who would not have entered the political arena

in the past. Twenty-seven percent of those elected to the district councils in 2001 were women⁵³ and more than 30 percent of those elected to district councils in 2006 (and currently serving) are women.

The system of women's councils is an additional electoral structure that has been key to guaranteeing women's representation in Rwanda. Women's councils are grassroots bodies elected at the cell level by only women, and then through indirect election at each successive administrative level, which operate in parallel to the general local councils and represent women's concerns. The Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (MIGEPRO-FE) established the women's councils shortly after the genocide, and their role has expanded considerably. The women's councils fill the reserved seats in Rwanda's parliament—the 30 percent that the quota sets aside.

Electoral structures such as the triple balloting system and the women's councils help improve the sustainability of women's gains by serving as conduits for women to enter politics and gain skills and confidence. Berthe Mukamusoni, elected to parliament on the women's ballot during the transitional period, explained it this way:

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.⁵⁴

Providing women-only routes into politics is particularly important when lack of access to education and cultural barriers to women's participation in politics have prevented many women from gaining as much experience as some male candidates. Successful women candidates can encourage other women to run for office, especially while political office remains a new experience for most Rwandan women. Only with a large field of qualified women candidates will women keep winning seats in parliament—and keep proving their worth to skeptics.

The women's councils provide, therefore, an important vehicle for women's leadership training.

Forum of Women Parliamentarians

The presence and strength of the FFRP greatly enhance prospects for sustaining women's gains in Rwanda. The cross-party, multi-ethnic caucus focuses on devising legislative strategies to address issues of concern to women. Established in 1996 by women members of the transitional parliament (MPs), the FFRP has been a crucial institution for facilitating women's leadership and translating women's presence in parliament into action on legislation. Research supports a link between the formation of a women's caucus and women's increased impact on the political process.⁵⁵ Caucuses can provide important means of support to women by creating a forum where mentoring and informal exchanges can occur. They also provide a formal entity to support women's advocacy, which is essential to securing international funding and technical assistance. The FFRP's ability to attract donor financing has been critical to sustaining women's advancements in Rwandan politics.

Reaching out to men as partners in promoting gender equality has been one of the most important ways in which the FFRP has contributed to the sustainability of women's political leadership in Rwanda. Women parliamentarians have sought to involve men in the development of legislation on gender issues and have emphasized that they see themselves as working on behalf of all members of Rwandan society, as well as women in particular.⁵⁶ For instance, in introducing the gender-based violence bill, women parliamentarians invited male colleagues to co-sponsor the legislation. The significance of the way in which women in Rwanda have approached men as allies should not be underestimated; the promotion of women's interests is most sustainable when it is a broad-based goal of all parliamentarians, rather than the exclusive province of women.

Finally, the Forum has provided a framework for women parliamentarians to take an active and visible role in crafting and introducing legislation. In introducing the gender-based violence bill in 2006, the women were responsible for the first piece of substantive parliament-initiated legislation since the ratification of the 2003 constitution. Although women's influence as cultural symbols should not be overstated, neither should it be dismissed as irrelevant or inconsequential. Women's visibility as leaders contributes a great deal to changing

cultural norms regarding women's roles in Rwandan society, which itself helps increase the likelihood that their gains will be sustained. While symbolism alone fails as a foundation from which to expect future successes, it is nonetheless an important factor in sustaining women's achievements in Rwanda.

Executive Branch Structures

The executive branch is powerful within Rwandan politics, and sustaining women's gains requires going beyond the current and oft-cited "political will" to mainstream gender concerns within all ministries and ensure that women serve in a variety of capacities. Within the executive branch, 34 percent of all cabinet ministers are women, including female heads of key ministries such as development cooperation, information, education, gender, labor, and human resource development. Within the judiciary, women make up 44 percent of judges, including the president of the Supreme Court and the heads of several district courts.

At the national level, MIGEPROFE in the Office of the Prime Minister coordinates the government's efforts on gender issues. This ministry has responsibility for both "gender" concerns and "women's empowerment" and has made deliberate efforts not to conflate the terms or issues. 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.

A new structure in the executive, mandated by the 2003 constitution, but only recently coming into force, is the "Gender Observatory." This institution operates as an ombudsman's office on gender issues, monitoring and reporting on implementation of reforms. MP Anastasia Gahondogo noted that male parliamentarians fully supported creation of the Gender Observatory and actually made proposals to strengthen it.⁵⁷

Civil Society

Women continue to make some of their most significant contributions to governance work in civil society. Immediately after the genocide, with society and government in disarray, women's NGOs filled the vacuum, providing a variety of services to the population. Women's organizations have developed into strong networks. For example, the Association of the Widows of the Genocide

(AVEGA) grew from an organization of 5 women who gathered to grieve and share their sorrow to its current membership of over 30,000. Professional associations have also flourished, such as HAGURUKA, the association of Rwandan women lawyers, which advocates for legal reforms, provides free legal advice to vulnerable women, and mobilizes other women's associations to address women's legal rights.

Because most groups formed in the capital of Kigali, women strategically have recruited rural women to participate in the various organizations. AVEGA's leaders, for example, traveled across the country to identify female survivors, encouraging them to form local chapters to console and counsel one another. In this way, a network of small associations throughout the country has formed and connected directly to larger, urban associations that advocate on its behalf, seek funding for projects, and conduct training for men and women.

Formal networks of women's organizations can act as important vehicles for facilitating women's political activism. One expert notes: "No single women's group can adequately assume such diverse roles. However, a multitude of autonomous groups effectively networking may achieve the critical mass needed to transform women's struggles into workable strategies for bringing about a gender-equitable society."⁵⁸ To coordinate the activities of various women's groups, give the movement a unified voice, and mobilize resources, an umbrella organization that had been founded in 1992, Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, was revived in the aftermath of the genocide. It now encompasses 40 women's associations with varying missions and membership but with the single goal of promoting and empowering women to enhance unity and the culture of peace in post-conflict Rwanda.⁵⁹

Women in Rwanda's civil society push for policy processes that involve consultations with the local population, their grassroots memberships, and women serving in government. For instance, during the period before the ratification of the new constitution, Pro-Femmes held multiple consultations with its member NGOs and women at the grassroots level throughout the country to elicit concerns, interests, and suggestions regarding the new constitution. They then met with representatives of MIGEPROFE and the FFRP to report their members' concerns. Together, MIGEPROFE, the parliamentary caucus, and Pro-Femmes contributed to a policy paper that recommended specific actions for making the constitution gender-sensitive and submitted it to the

Constitutional Commission. Once the draft constitution reflected their interests, Pro-Femmes engaged in an awareness and mobilization campaign encouraging women to support the adoption of the document in the countrywide referendum.

Women's civil society organizations also spearheaded collection of women's personal testimonies about their experiences during and after the genocide. Women's groups encouraged women to testify about their experiences during the genocide and its aftermath. This campaign brought the plight of Rwanda's women to the attention of national and local leaders, who began to see women's concerns as a major challenge and responsibility of society. In fact, the founder of SEVOTA (an organization supporting widows and orphans of the genocide), Godelive Mukasarasi, believes that "women's testimonies were instrumental in ensuring that rape during the genocide period be place[d] in the first [legal] category, deserving [the harshest punishment]."⁶⁰

Civil society has also served as a conduit for future women government leaders. Women's associations have encouraged members to attend meetings or trainings organized at the village level, to actively participate in local elections, and, more generally, to learn how to take charge of the affairs that affect them. Women's organizations hold separate meetings with local women to identify the best female candidates, inspire them to stand for office, and support their bids for election. Some observers have cautioned that this movement of women leaders into government drains civil society of talented leadership. As scholar Jennie Burnet warns, "The net result of so many women being included at all levels of government is that the most vibrant leaders of women's civil society organizations left to take positions in the government ... [and] women's civil society organizations were faced with a vacuum in leadership."⁶¹ Others have pointed out, however, that the close links between women in civil society and government are highly productive and that new women can emerge to take over for those that move into government service.

Certainly, the government does not proceed on 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, MIGEPROFE, and the FFRP. A 2002 report commissioned by USAID recognized the challenges facing Rwandan civil society, including limited capacity, excessive government control,

and lack of coordination, but concluded that women's NGOs comprise the "most vibrant sector" of civil society in Rwanda.⁶²

Fundamental Changes?

Women now commonly hold decision-making positions in Rwanda. As MP Gahondogo notes, "It is now becoming more of a surprise to find no women in any committee than to find many women, and both men and women will point out any discrepancy when it exists."⁶³ At least among political elites, it has become a cultural norm to focus on gender balance. In the 2003 parliamentary election, for example, the two leading national youth candidates were male. A male parliamentarian raised the question of equal representation, leading to a heated debate over possible solutions. Ultimately, the parliament allowed the imbalance to remain. In the 2008 parliamentary election, however, a young man filled one seat and a young woman the other.

As women make gains in government, business, and civil society, it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine this trend reversing. In fact, women have joined non-traditional professions, such as construction, the police, and security forces, and hold highly visible positions. According to Patricia Mukantamaga, women have overcome the traditions and stereotypes that previously relegated them solely to the professions of nurse, secretary, and teacher. She concludes:

A spirit of competition has increased among the women of Rwanda so much that to pull them back is practically impossible. They may lose their political positions—if the political will to include them changes, but they will remain in the economic and professional fields they have acquired. Women can no longer sit back and wait on their husbands.⁶⁴

It is nearly impossible to separate women's political gains from gains in other areas, particularly women's integration into the labor force. Women's presence in all aspects of Rwandan economic and social life is a necessary element of re-shaping cultural attitudes about women's abilities and roles, which in turn will contribute to more sustainable prospects for women's political participation.

Obstacles Remain

Although many efforts have facilitated progress toward gender equality and women's rights since the genocide, obstacles remain. Some Rwandans hold fiercely to traditions that discriminate against women, while systemic challenges such as poverty and lack of access to education consistently obstruct the realization of women's equality. Despite significant progress in recent years, women in Rwanda continue to experience repression as a result of traditions that both men and women perpetuate. For instance, certain cultural values still encourage women to subordinate themselves to men. While it may be true "that within the Rwandan culture, there are certain tendencies or traits that are not conducive to interpersonal communication and free and open debate particularly in the open sphere," these constraints are particularly onerous for women.⁶⁵ Young girls are still taught that it is virtuous to speak softly or not speak at all, particularly in the presence of men. Women are expected to refrain from expressing themselves in public and remain at the service of men. MP Gahondogo notes: "During most of the official functions, it is [still] the women who are seen serving and ushering in guests even though it is known that men are capable of playing the same role...."⁶⁶

Women's roles in the household and marriage have changed more slowly than have their roles as public figures. Even when educated or employed, women continue to shoulder their traditional family duties of caring for children and performing daily household chores in addition to various social demands and expectations. For example, while women are expected to assist a grieving family after a funeral, men may acceptably offer excuses such as work or other obligations as reasons they cannot. One expert notes: "Such social requirements do exert an extra burden on an educated, progressive woman who has to fulfill both the work related demands plus the family and social demands. It does not matter if she is a cabinet minister, an office worker or a village house wife, their family roles still remain the same."⁶⁷

In 2003, the Rwandan constitution exclusively recognized "one civil monogamous marriage between a man and a woman," and family law now prohibits marriage with more than one wife. However, polygamy remains a problem across the country, particularly in the northern region. Because polygamous families result in many children, they can contribute to increased poverty levels, family tensions, and women's vulnerability. This issue has sparked national and local debate, and the government's awareness-raising campaigns have had some unintended

consequences. For example, with official encouragement to legalize marriage, men in polygamous relationships tend to choose the youngest women to become their legal wives, marginalizing women from their earlier relationships. Bride price also remains a contentious issue. While some believe bride price is necessary to legalize a marriage, others contend that it contributes to women's subordinate position in society by perpetuating the idea that men own women and make decisions for them.

Women's enrollment in universities has increased, but, as a whole, women still attain lower educational levels than men. Men and boys remain more likely than women to receive education and training in Rwanda. Literacy rates are estimated at 47.8 percent for women, 58.1 percent for men. Twenty-five percent of women have never attended school, compared with only 17 percent of men. Just 5.8 percent of Rwandan women benefit from apprenticeship training compared to 9.1 percent of men. Only 2.6 percent of women receive vocational training compared with 7.3 percent of men.⁶⁸ These disparities are even more dramatic in rural areas, where the majority of Rwandan women live.

Lack of education or familiarity with public leadership positions can mean that women do not possess the self-confidence to run for local or national office. Former mayor Florence Kamili Kayiraba feels a responsibility to act as a model for other women and to encourage them to stand for office.⁶⁹ However, she cites lack of experience and fear of competing, campaigning, and marketing themselves as reasons many Rwandan women hesitate to stand for office. Once women win office, they may find themselves working double duty since, in addition to carrying a full slate of official responsibilities, women are seen as responsible for all issues having to do with gender or women's issues. As she explained:

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].⁷⁰

Particularly when combined with an unreduced commitment to household duties, this double responsibility can add to the stress of leadership and make women politicians feel overburdened, perhaps prompting them to seek shorter tenures in office.

Lingering forms of male resistance to women's leadership continue to challenge the permanence of women's gains. According to anecdotal evidence from women leaders, successful women tend to find their husbands challenged by their wives' roles. This superiority or inferiority complex can lead to tensions and even violence in the family as women advance in public or corporate life. MP Gahondogo describes the situation as follows: "For women in high levels of leadership, a husband's inferiority complex leads to several misunderstandings, conflicts, and sometimes physical abuse by the men."⁷¹ Men may refrain from speaking publicly about these feelings, perhaps because of social prohibitions—referred to in Rwanda as *kwirarira*—that discourage openly disagreeing with a practice deemed good or useful, such as gender equality. While many men may not support gender equality, they may also not speak out against women's equal status because of *kwirarira*, lest they appear uncultured or unsupportive of women.

The Next Generation

Schools regularly sensitize youth to gender equality and youth are more likely consider women's rights to be a value of Rwandan culture. The formal education sector has encouraged capacity development of women and young girls, and a mandate for universal primary education has greatly increased girls' enrollment in school. The Rwandan government has also incorporated a life-skills program that includes a module on gender into school curriculums. The program introduces children between the ages of 9 and 13 to definitions and concepts of gender, including gender balance, relations between men and women, gender disparities, and ways to address these issues. Secondary schools present more complex topics, teaching students the relationship between gender and economic development. According to curriculum guidelines, the program is designed to produce specific outcomes related to gender equality: "People would have the same opportunities in matters of employment. Women as well as men would take part in decision-making. There

would be laws that protect all the citizens (men, women, boys and girls) who would all contribute to the development of the country. Men and women would be partners in their tasks."⁷²

Furthermore, gender has become a subject of household discussion and an entrenched concept in modern Rwandan culture. According to Christine Kibiriti, a researcher and consultant on gender issues in Rwanda, Rwandan men today consider it trendy and a sign of progress to have an educated wife, hence the growing support for women's education by their husbands. That wives who work outside the home provide a second income plays a significant role in convincing men of the merits of women's education. One male parliamentarian noted that he has observed that men want their daughters to take advantage of new opportunities, even if those same men resist the idea that their relationships with their wives should also embody equality of opportunity.⁷³ That a younger generation of Rwandans is more open to the idea of gender equality and more able to benefit from the expanded opportunities offered to women suggests that women have a better chance of sustaining cultural and social gains in the long-term.

Cultural norms regarding women's roles in Rwandan society have changed a great deal in the 15 years since the genocide, in large part because of government-supported promotion of women's rights and gender equality. As women's participation in politics has grown more common, ideas about women as leaders in other sectors of society have shifted. However, these shifts have been—and continue to be—gradual and are at times inconsistent. Backlash against women's gains occurs, often in private, and history suggests that women's status as cultural symbols can render them vulnerable to sanctions and violence in times of social tension.

Sustaining women's gains in Rwanda cannot depend solely on political will or the faith that improvements in gender relations will be irreversible. Indeed, Rwanda has gone beyond simply electing the world's first parliament with a female majority and has implemented structures that can help advance a long-term project of supporting women's remarkable achievements. Women parliamentarians have effectively used their cross-party caucus to attract donor funding and develop ground-breaking legislation. While many contend that the government monitors and restricts civil society organizations in Rwanda, women's organizations have managed to use their greater latitude to forge important relationships with constitu-

ents, parliamentarians, and ministries. Indigenous concepts of gender roles may contain conflicting messages about women's worth and ability as public figures, but effective governance structures allow women to draw on cultural strengths while working to address persistent forms of patriarchal oppression.

Conclusion

Current political discourse on gender issues in Rwanda emphasizes gender-sensitive historical values in an effort to demonstrate continuity with the past and an indigenous basis for modern positions. Some gender practices of pre-colonial Rwanda did in fact protect and promote women through recognition of their role as family managers and mothers. Combined with historical examples of women's leadership in politics and religion, a traditional understanding of women's identity and rights arguably does exist in Rwandan culture. At the same time, other traditional practices subjugated women by excluding them from public decision-making, limiting their influence over major household decisions, preventing their ownership of land, and subjecting them to private forms of sexual violence. Indigenous culture therefore promoted certain aspects of women's worth as it stifled others; these competing strands within Rwandan society make it impossible to state that women's contemporary achievements directly relate to their status in traditional culture.

Ultimately, rather than a product of indigenous culture, much of women's advancement in the post-genocide period seems the result of exceptional social and political factors in the post-conflict period. In the aftermath of the genocide, efforts to promote women were largely facilitated by active political support of the ruling RPF. The president and other high-level officials adopted gender equality as a priority of the post-genocide national government. Leaders pursued a strategy that placed women's empowerment at the center of development strategy for the nation as a whole.

There is justified skepticism about the sustainability of post-genocide efforts to promote women's political par-

ticipation. High levels of poverty, low literacy rates, and high HIV/AIDS infection rates all present barriers to women's full empowerment in Rwanda. Furthermore, male backlash against women's gains is a significant, if not highly visible, problem. The sustainability of women's advancements is contingent upon the implementation of key legal reforms such as women's right to inherit land and the law on gender-based violence, as well as the maintenance of institutions that protect and support women. Support for the national women's machinery should continue, and all efforts should be made to strengthen women's networks and civil society groups. Potential women leaders need ongoing training and education to ensure their preparation for the new positions available to them. Continued efforts to change social attitudes will require ongoing sensitization of citizens to the importance of women's empowerment and may be more sustainable when rooted in indigenous cultural values that respect and appreciate women's contributions to the home and society.

Drawing lessons from the Rwandan experience, it is evident that rooting modern changes with references to tradition and indigenous culture can be an effective tool for women and men in post-conflict countries to promote women's political participation. However, fundamental social and cultural shifts also require national leadership, legal reforms, progressive policies and mandates, institutional mechanisms, a vibrant women's movement, widespread raising of awareness, and public investment in women's rights and gender equality. Together, these components have shaped the political landscape for gender equality in Rwanda. Only time will tell whether the dramatic gains are sustainable.

Appendix 1: Acronyms

AVEGA	Association of the Widows of the Genocide
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
FFRP	Forum of Women Parliamentarians
GBV	Gender-based violence
GNU	Government of National Unity
HAGURUKA	Rwandan women lawyers association
MIGEPROFE	Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion
MP	Member of Parliament
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SEVOTA	a non-governmental organization that assists widows and orphans of the April 1994 Tutsi massacre in Taba
USAID	The US Agency for International Development

Appendix 2: Glossary of French and Kinyarwandan Terms

<i>ethnie</i>	one's ethnicity
<i>gacaca</i>	customary system of justice; more recently, special courts to deal with genocide crimes
<i>genocidaires</i>	perpetrators of genocide
<i>gutabira</i>	This practice of a bridegroom leaving his family to live with his bride in her family's homestead during the first days of marriage was intended to help the girl adjust to her husband before she made the transition to a new home and assumed the responsibilities that came with being a wife and mother.
<i>gutsinda</i>	the practice forbidding a married woman to speak the names of her in-laws or her husband's uncles and aunts out of reverence
<i>inkwano</i>	bride price
<i>Kanjogera</i>	The name of a notorious and ruthless queen mother. Today, <i>Kanjogera</i> has become synonymous with a woman who wields terrible power and is the real authority behind the public face of a male leader.
<i>kwirarira</i>	social prohibitions that discourage openly disagreeing with a practice deemed good or useful, such as gender equality
<i>mabuja</i>	female boss
<i>Ukurusha umugore akurusha urugo</i>	"With a great woman, a great home is assured."
<i>umubyeyi</i>	term for "mother" which also has connotations of "creator" and "life giver"
<i>umugabo</i>	literally means "a man," but was long used as a term for "witness" in <i>gacaca</i> hearings
<i>umubamya</i>	the term now used for "witness"
<i>umutima w'urugo</i>	the heart of a home
<i>umweko</i>	strings or belts that tied clothes around women's waists
<i>Uragapfa utabyaye</i>	"May you die childless," considered the worst of all insults.
<i>Uruvuzze umugore ruvuga umuboro</i>	"A home with a vocal or assertive woman results in nothing but bloodshed."

Appendix 3: Bibliography

- Bauer, Gretchen and Hannah Britton. *Women in African Politics: A Continental Shift? Women in African Parliaments*. Edited by Gretchen Bauer and Hannah Britton. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006.
- Bigirimwami, Bishop Aloys. Imihango n'Imigenzo n'Imiziririzo mu Rwanda (Rites, Practices and Taboos in Rwanda), 4th Edition. Palloti-Press, Kigali 2003.
- Brown, Jennifer and Justine Uvuza. "Women's Land Rights in Rwanda: How Can They Be Protected and Strengthened As the Land Law Is Implemented?" Seattle: Rural Development Institute, 2006, http://www.rdiland.org/PDF/PDF_Reports/RDI_123.pdf.
- Burnet, Jennie E. "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *African Affairs*, no. 428 (2008): 361-386.
- Chamber of Deputies, session observation, 2 August 2006.
- Eltringham, Nigel. *Accounting for Horror: Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda*. London: Pluto Press, 2004.
- Etude sur l'implication des femme dans les instances de prise de decision, Reseau des Femmes, August 1999. [Translated from the French.]
- Gahene, interview by Peace Uwineza, 11 November 2008.
- Gahene, interview by Peace Uwineza, 14 July 2006.
- Gahondogo, Anastasia, interview by Peace Uwineza, 29 June 2006.
- Gatoyi, interview by Peace Uwineza, 16 June 2006.
- "Gender, Nation-Building and Role of Parliaments," conference observation, Kigali, 22 February 2007.
- Government of Rwanda. *A Guide to Civic Education, Upper Primary Level*. Kigali: 2004.
- Ingabire, Immaculee, interview by Peace Uwineza, 2006.
- Ingingo z'Ingenzi mu Mateka y'u Rwanda, President's Office, 1972. [Translated from the Kinyarwanda.]
- Kagame, Paul. Official speech. 1999.
- Kamili Kayiraba, Florence, interview by Elizabeth Powley, 2002.
- Kanakuze, Judith, interview by Elizabeth Pearson and Elizabeth Powley, 2006.
- Kiribiti, Christine. *A Study on Beliefs, Attitudes, and Socio-Cultural Practices Related to Gender in Rwanda*, 2002.
- Law to Supplement Book One of the Civil Code and to Institute Part Five Regarding Matrimonial Regimes, Liberalities and Successions (Law No. 22/00). Kigali, Republic of Rwanda: 1999.
- Management Systems International, *Rwanda Democracy and Governance Assessment*. Washington, DC: MSI, 2002.
- Mbonimana, Gamariel, interview by Peace Uwineza, 22 June 2006.
- "Measuring the Quality of Governance." The World Bank: 14 July 2003.
- Mukamusoni, Berte, interview by Elizabeth Powley, trans. in part by Connie Bwiza Sekamana, 10 July 2002.
- Mukantabana, Rose, interview by Elizabeth Pearson, 26 July 2006.
- Mukantamage, Patricia, interview by Peace Uwineza, 17 August 2006.
- Mukasarasi, Godelive, interview by Peace Uwineza, 2006.
- Mutamba and Izabiriza. *The 2001 Household Living Conditions Survey and the Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire*.
- Mutamba, John, interview by Peace Uwineza, 23 June 2006.
- National Electoral Commission of Rwanda, *Cities and Districts Administrative Elections March 6 to 13, 2001, Summary Results*. Kigali: Rwanda, 2001.
- Nibishaka, Aimable, interview by Elizabeth Pearson, 24 August 2006.
- Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart. "Women As Political Leaders Worldwide: Cultural Barriers and Opportunities" in *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*. Eds. Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Pearson, Elizabeth. "Demonstrating Legislative Leadership: The Introduction of Rwanda's Gender-Based Violence Bill." Ed. Elizabeth Powley. Washington: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2008.
- Pottier, Johan. *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Powley, Elizabeth and Elizabeth Pearson. "Gender is Society': Inclusive Lawmaking in Rwanda's Parliament." *Critical Half* 5, 1 (Winter 2007).
- Powley, Elizabeth. "Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda's Transition." Washington: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2003.
- Prunier, Gerard. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Rapport soumis par le gouvernement Belge à l'assemblée générale des Nations Unies au sujet de l'administration du Ruanda – Urundi, 1959. [Translated from the French.]
- Rushanda, Joyce, interview by Peace Uwineza, 20 June 2008.

Rutayisire, Paul, interview by Peace Uwineza, 15 June 2006.

The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (Special Law No. 42/2003). Kigali: Republic of Rwanda. 2003.

The National Gender Policy. Kigali: Government of Rwanda, 2004.

Thomas, Sue. "The Impact of Women on State Legislative Policies." *Journal of Politics* 53, 4 (November 1991).

United States Department of State. Background Note: Rwanda. Washington, DC: 2007.

Valentine, Moghadam M. *Globalizing Women: Transitional Feminist Networks*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Violence Against Women. Kigali: Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, 2004.

Endnotes

- 1 Thirty percent of seats were guaranteed by a quota for women; the additional 26 percent were earned through competition on political party ballots.
- 2 Excerpted and adapted from the definition of “gender” utilized in the Policy Commission reports of The Institute for Inclusive Security, available at www.huntalternatives.org.
- 3 “Measuring the Quality of Governance,” The World Bank, 14 July 2003. http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/pubs/govmatters3_other.html.
- 4 Excerpted and adapted from Powley, Elizabeth. *Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda’s Transition*. Washington, DC: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2003. http://www.huntalternatives.org/download/10_strengthening_governance_the_role_of_women_in_rwanda_s_transition.pdf.
- 5 *Background Note: Rwanda*. Washington, DC: United States Department of State, 2007. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ci/bgn/2861.htm>.
- 6 Paul Rutayisire. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 15 June 2006.
- 7 *The National Gender Policy*. Kigali: Government of Rwanda, 2004. 9.
- 8 Etude sur l’implication des femme dans les instances de prise de decision, Réseau des Femmes, August 1999, pg. 41. [Translated from the French]
- 9 Gahene. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 14 July 2006.
- 10 Rapport soumis par le gouvernement Belge à l’assemblée générale des Nations Unies au sujet de l’administration du Ruanda – Urundi, 1959. pg 183. [Translated from the French.]
- 11 John Mutamba. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 23 June 2006.
- 12 For a full discussion of women and land rights in Rwanda, see Brown, Jennifer and Justine Uvuza. “Women’s Land Rights in Rwanda: How Can They Be Protected and Strengthened As the Land Law Is Implemented?” Seattle: Rural Development Institute, 2006. http://www.rdiland.org/PDF/PDF_Reports/RDI_123.pdf.
- 13 Gatoyi. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 16 June 2006.
- 14 Brown and Uvuza, 23.
- 15 Rapport soumis par le gouvernement Belge à l’assemblée générale des Nations Unies au sujet de l’administration du Ruanda – Urundi, 1959. pg 183. [Translated from the French.]
- 16 Gahene. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 11 November 2008.
- 17 Bishop Aloys Bigirumwami. Imihango n’Imigenzo n’Imiziririzo mu Rwanda, Nyundo Diocese, 4th Edition, 2004. 82.
- 18 Bigirumwami 151.
- 19 Joyce Rushanda. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 20 June 2008.
- 20 Rapport soumis par le gouvernement Belge à l’assemblée générale des Nations Unies au sujet de l’administration du Ruanda – Urundi, 1959. pg 183. [Translated from the French.]
- 21 Rushanda.
- 22 Etude sur l’implication des femme dans les instances de prise de decision, Réseau des Femmes, pg. 46, August 1999, 41 .
- 23 Christine Kiribiti. *A Study on Beliefs, Attitudes, and Socio-Cultural Practices Related to Gender in Rwanda*, 2002, 13.
- 24 Kiribiti, 13.
- 25 Gahene. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 14 July 2006.
- 26 Women chiefs included: Nyirakabuga, one of King Musinga’s wives who ruled over Gisaka (now Izaza), Nyirakigwene Dancilla who ruled in Kamonyi, Gitarama, and Mushambokazi in Kivuruga and Mukarurengo in Cyuve—both in the northern region.
- 27 Ingingo z’Ingenzi mu Mateka y’u Rwanda, President’s Office, 1972. “Umugabekazi nawe yali afite ububasha bwo kwica. Nka Nyirayuhi yali afite inkota ye yitwaga ruhuga, yavuga ati ruhuga ifite inyota, bakazana umwana w’umushishe bakamwuhira amata, yamara kumwuzura inda, akayimushinga akamuhagukiraho.” [Translated from the Kinyarwanda.]
- 28 Gerard Prunier. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- 29 Elizabeth Powley. *Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda’s Transition*. Washington, DC: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2003. 10.
- 30 Gahene. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 14 July 2006.
- 31 *Violence Against Women*. Kigali: Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, 2004.
- 32 Judith Kanakuze. Interview by Elizabeth Pearson and Elizabeth Powley. Summer 2006.
- 33 Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. “Women As Political Leaders Worldwide: Cultural Barriers and Opportunities” in *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*. Eds. Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- 34 Gretchen Bauer and Hannah Britton. “Women in African Politics: A Continental Shift?” in *Women in African Parliaments*. Eds. Gretchen Bauer and Hannah Britton. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006.
- 35 Bauer and Britton, 11.
- 36 Quoted in Powley, Elizabeth. *Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda’s Transition*. Washington: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2003. 23.
- 37 Ibid, 17.
- 38 Patricia Mukantamage. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 17 August 2006.
- 39 Rose Mukantabana. Interview by Elizabeth Pearson. 26 July 2006, Kigali.
- 40 Elizabeth Powley. *Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda’s Transition*. Washington: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2003, 16.
- 41 For a full discussion of debate over the introduction of GBV legislation, see Pearson, Elizabeth. *Demonstrating Legislative Leadership: The Introduction of Rwanda’s Gender-Based Violence Bill*. Ed. Elizabeth Powley. Washington: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2008.
- 42 Chamber of Deputies, session observation, 2 August 2006.
- 43 Paul Kagame. Official speech. 1999.
- 44 “Gender, Nation-Building and Role of Parliaments” Conference observation, Kigali, 22 February 2007.
- 45 Johan Pottier. *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Dis-*

- information in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- 46 Pottier, 179.
- 47 Nigel Eltringham. *Accounting for Horror: Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda*. London: Pluto Press, 2004.
- 48 Gamariel Mbonimana. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 22 June 2006.
- 49 Chamber of Deputies, session observation, 2 August 2006.
- 50 Immaculee Ingabire. Interview by Peace Uwineza. Summer 2006.
- 51 *The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda* (Special Law No. 42/2003). Kigali: Republic of Rwanda. 2003.
- 52 *Law to Supplement Book One of the Civil Code and to Institute Part Five Regarding Matrimonial Regimes, Liberalities and Successions* (Law No. 22/00). Kigali, Republic of Rwanda: 1999. Women's right to own land was strengthened in 2005 by passage of Organic Law No. 08/2005, *Determining the Use and Management of Land in Rwanda*.
- 53 National Electoral Commission of Rwanda, *Cities and Districts Administrative Elections March 6 to 13, 2001, Summary Results* (Kigali: Rwanda, 2001) 15.
- 54 Berte Mukamsoni. Interview by Elizabeth Powley, trans. in part by Connie Bwiza Sekamana, 10 July 2002.
- 55 For instance, Thomas's classic research on American legislatures shows that states with formal women's caucuses were more likely to introduce and pass legislation related to women's and children's interests. See Thomas, Sue. "The Impact of Women on State Legislative Policies." *Journal of Politics* 53, 4 (November 1991): 958-976.
- 56 For a full discussion of women parliamentarians' efforts to engage men in the development of gender-based violence legislation, see Powley, Elizabeth and Elizabeth Pearson. "Gender is Society": Inclusive Lawmaking in Rwanda's Parliament." *Critical Half* 5, 1 (Winter 2007): 14-19.
- 57 Anastasia Gahondogo. Interview by Peace Uwineza. 29 June 2006.
- 58 Moghadam M Valentine. *Globalizing Women: Transitional Feminist Networks*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. 142.
- 59 Many consider Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe to be primarily a Tutsi umbrella group; some of its member organizations such as Reseau des Femmes are, however, known for greater diversity.
- 60 Godelive Mukasarasi. Interview by Peace Uwineza. Summer 2006.
- 61 Jennie E Burnet. "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *African Affairs*, 107/428, 361-386, 2008.
- 62 Management Systems International, *Rwanda Democracy and Governance Assessment* (Washington, DC: MSI, 2002) 35, 37.
- 63 Gahondogo.
- 64 Mukantamaga.
- 65 Mutamba and Izabiriza. *The 2001 Household Living Conditions Survey and the Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire*. 35.
- 66 Gahondogo.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Mutamba and Izabiriza.
- 69 Florence Kamili Kayiraba. Interview by Elizabeth Powley. 2002.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Gahondogo.
- 72 *A Guide to Civic Education, Upper Primary Level*. Kigali: Government of Rwanda, 2004. 177.
- 73 Aimable Nibishaka. Interview by Elizabeth Pearson. 24 August 2006.

