

## LESSONS FROM RWANDA: FEMALE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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## ABSTRACT

Gender equality is a basic human right that entails equal opportunities for men and women in all facets of life: socially, economically, developmentally and politically. According to the Beijing Platform for Action, without the active participation of women in and the incorporation of their perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. This paper sets out to examine the increased female representation in Rwanda's Parliament to determine whether it has affected women in other spheres of life. It also provides an overview of the current status of women in African politics, as well as of the current governance situation in Rwanda. It is clear that Rwanda has made significant efforts to elevate the status of women in its post-genocide society. However, it is also important to recognise Parliament's limitations in an increasingly authoritarian system of governance. While women members of Parliament have passed legislation to empower women in society, a lack of information and education prevents many from taking advantage of new opportunities. Yet Rwanda is clearly on the right path towards improving its gender parity and must uphold its efforts to do so, while prioritising formal education for girls and women at all levels.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
FFRP	Forum des Femmes Rwandaises Parlementaires (Forum of Women Parliamentarians)
MP	member of Parliament
MIGEPROF	Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion

## INTRODUCTION

A historical outcome of patriarchal societies is that women tend not to be well represented in government. Sociologists point out that women and girls are disadvantaged in life relative to men and boys,<sup>1</sup> and this is reflected in political representation. Thus it is not surprising that the majority of elected leaders are male, which leads to gender inequalities being perpetuated even further in societies. However, in the past 10 years Africa has seen an increase in the number of women holding positions of power and influence, with notable examples being Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Joyce Banda and Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.<sup>2</sup> Three African nations are in the top 10 for female representation in parliaments globally: Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa. Is the status of women in African politics thus changing? Rwanda provides a unique case study, due to its female-majority Parliament.

## BACKGROUND: WOMEN IN AFRICAN POLITICS

Gender equality in governance is critical to ensure the active participation of women and the incorporation of their perspectives in all levels of decision-making. Table 1 provides information on the percentage of women in national parliaments by region.

	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both houses combined
Americas	27.7%	27.0%	27.6%
Europe-OSCE* member countries including Nordic countries	26.0%	25.1%	25.8%
Sub-Saharan Africa	23.1%	22.0%	23.0%
Asia	19.5%	16.0%	19.2%
Arab states	19.0%	12.6%	18.1%
Pacific	13.9%	34.8%	16.3%

\* Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Women in national parliaments', <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>, accessed 28 November 2016

- 1 Kevane M, *Women and Development in Africa: How Gender Works*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004.
- 2 Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has been the president of Liberia since 2006, Joyce Banda was the president of Malawi from 2012–2014 and Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma is the outgoing chairperson of the AU Commission (elected in 2012).

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Patriarchy is one of the most significant barriers faced by women wanting to enter and participate in politics

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From Table 1 it is clear that women still play a small role in politics around the world. Although gender inequality is a global problem, in Africa (and in other parts of the world) women face additional challenges that keep them in subservient positions. Patriarchy is one of the most significant barriers faced by women wanting to enter and participate in politics. It is used as an ideological tool to place women within the private arena of the home as mothers and wives, and men in the public sphere of politics and economics. Patriarchal societies consist of male institutions and traditions that entrench female subordination. From an early age, most girls and boys are socialised to believe that women should play subordinate roles.<sup>3</sup> Resistance from men, families and society are thus the main hindrances for women interested in seeking political office or even for those already elected.

In many African societies, women are not viewed as leaders and their opinions are rarely considered in decision-making processes.<sup>4</sup> Culture still plays a major role in influencing attitudes against women's involvement in politics. This is evidenced by voting patterns, media's representation of female candidates and at times direct suppression of women's political rights.<sup>5</sup> Men are seen as being responsible for ensuring the good behaviour of their wives and daughters. Wives are expected to be upright, daughters to be virgins and widows to be virtuous.<sup>6</sup> This control inhibits their access to vital resources such as education, skills and income, all of which could lead to independence and a political life.

In a number of countries, tradition constrains women when they try to enter into politics. For instance, in rural parts (and some developed areas) of Ghana, women are expected to keep in the background. When they are outspoken they often face ridicule, which can affect their self-esteem and confidence.<sup>7</sup> In pre-genocide Rwanda, 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*.<sup>8</sup>

Education is also a major barrier for women who want to enter into politics, as many lack even the basic education needed to empower themselves. In Malawi 73% of men are literate compared to 59% of women. This is a result of boys being more valued than

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3 Wodi B, *Gender Issues in HIV/AIDS Epidemiology in Sub-Saharan Africa*. College at Cortland: State University of New York, 2005.

4 Cameron G, *Authentic African Leadership: Authentic African Leaders Defined and the Techniques that Made Them Great*. Johannesburg: Independent Group, 2014, pp. 15–20.

5 Tripp AM, *New Trends in Women's Political Participation in Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

6 McLean Hilker LC, 'Navigating adolescence and young adulthood in Rwanda during and after the genocide: Intersections of ethnicity, gender and age', *Children and Geographies*, 12, 3, 2014.

7 Soussou MA, 'We Do Not Enjoy Equal Political Rights: Ghanaian Women's Perception in Ghana', *SAGE Open*, 1, 1, 2011.

8 Uwineza P, Pearson E & E Powley, *Sustaining Women's Gains in Rwanda: The Influence of Indigenous Culture and post-Genocide Politics*. Washington DC: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2009.

girls; most families prefer to educate their sons rather than their daughters.<sup>9</sup> In Liberia only 32.8% of women are literate, while in Sierra Leone the percentage is around 38%.<sup>10</sup> If women continue to be educated at a lower level than men, it will negatively affect the country's development. It also makes it difficult for women to participate in political activities.

Yet despite these barriers, there has been progress on gender equality in some countries. Rwanda represents an interesting case study.

## CASE STUDY: RWANDA

In July 2016 Rwanda's President Paul Kagame was awarded an AU prize for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality. His country currently boasts the highest number of women parliamentarians globally in the lower chamber and continentally in the upper chamber. However, whether this commitment to gender parity at parliamentary level percolates into other levels of society is another question.

Women in Rwanda were formally given the right to stand for election in 1961, following the country's independence from Belgium. Before the civil war in the early 1990s and the genocide in 1994, Rwandan women had never held more than 18% of seats in Parliament.<sup>11</sup> Following the 100 days of slaughter in 1994, Rwandan society was left in chaos. The death toll was estimated at between 800 000 and 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus.<sup>12</sup> Many suspected perpetrators were arrested or fled the country. According to the Genocide Archive of Rwanda,<sup>13</sup> immediately following the genocide 70% of Rwanda's population of approximately 5.5 million was female. Most of these women were not educated or raised with the expectation of following a career. In pre-genocide Rwanda it was almost unheard of for women to own land or have a job outside of the home.

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9 Kamlongera AP, 'Malawian women's participation in state politics: What are the constraints?', *Gender & Development*, 16, 3, 2008, pp. 471–480.

10 The World Bank Group, UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Institute for Statistics, *Global Education Digest: Comparing Education Statistics Around the World*, 2008.

11 IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union), 'Women in Parliament: 20 years in review', 2015, <https://binged.it/2l2kqM0>, accessed 27 February 2017.

12 SURF (Survivors Fund), 'Supporting survivors of the Rwandan genocide: Statistics', <http://survivors-fund.org.uk/resources/rwandan-history/statistics/>, accessed 27 February 2017.

13 Genocide Archive of Rwanda, [http://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php/Welcome\\_to\\_Genocide\\_Archive\\_Rwanda](http://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php/Welcome_to_Genocide_Archive_Rwanda), accessed 26 August 2016.



The genocide changed that. The war led to Rwanda's 'Rosie the Riveter'<sup>14</sup> moment and opened the door to Rwandan women – just as World War II had opened the door to careers for women in the US.

Since 1994 the Kigali administration has shown considerable resolve in promoting women's rights. During the genocide the country witnessed the consequences of excluding a group from fully participating in society.<sup>15</sup> According to Gender Minister Oda Gasinzigwa, the president once said, 'How can we develop our country if we leave half of the population behind?'<sup>16</sup> The 2003 constitution included quotas for women to occupy at least 30% of the seats in each chamber of Parliament. Political parties are likewise required to reserve 30% of their top positions for women. In the 2003 elections 48.8% of parliamentary seats in the lower chamber and 34.6% in the upper went to women. In 2008 this increased to 56.3% women in the lower chamber, while gender representation remained unchanged in the upper chamber. Since the country's last parliamentary elections in 2013, women occupy 49 out of 80 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (lower chamber) and 10 out of 26 seats in the Senate (upper chamber). This represents 61.3% and 38.5% of the lower and upper chambers, respectively.<sup>17</sup>

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Since elections in 2013, women occupy 49/80 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (61.3%) and 10/26 in the Senate (38.5%)

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Changes also occurred at local level. A separate system of women's councils was subsequently established to address issues such as education, health and personal security.<sup>18</sup> The current female majority in Parliament can also be attributed to policymakers in Rwanda, who have used selected aspects of Rwandan culture as positive resources to emphasise the benefits of having women in leadership positions. The cultural belief that women naturally make peace and seek to resist and prevent violence has resonated particularly well in post-genocide Rwanda.<sup>19</sup>

Yet how much power does the Rwandan Parliament really wield? According to Lia Nijzink, '[O]ne of the key challenges confronting parliaments in Africa is how to ensure government

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14 US women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers during World War II, as widespread male enlistment left gaping holes in the industrial labour force. Between 1940 and 1945 the percentage of women in the US workforce increased from 27% to nearly 37%, and by 1945 nearly one out of every four married women worked outside the home. 'Rosie the Riveter' was the star of a government campaign aimed at recruiting female workers for the munitions industry and became one of the most iconic images of working women during the war. See History.com, 'Rosie the Riveter', <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/rosie-the-riveter>, accessed 8 March 2017.

15 Hunt S, 'The rise of Rwanda's women: Rebuilding and reuniting a nation', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2014.

16 Topping A, 'Rwanda's women make strides towards equality 20 years after the genocide', *The Guardian*, 7 April 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/apr/07/rwanda-women-empowered-impoverished>, accessed 27 February 2017.

17 IPU, 'Women in parliaments: World classification', 1 January 2017, <http://www.ipu.org/WMN-e/classif.htm>, accessed 27 February 2017.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Uwineza P, Pearson E & E Powley, *op. cit.*



accountability.<sup>20</sup> All too often, legislation is passed through African parliaments, rather than by them. This is because in many (if not most) African states, political systems accord considerable power to the executive, either directly through the constitution or indirectly through party loyalties. Rwanda is no exception to this. Its Parliament generally lacks independence, merely endorsing presidential initiatives. The state is highly centralised and critics have accused it of displaying increasingly authoritarian tendencies. In the 2013 elections, Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (Front Patriotique Rwandais) got 76% of the vote.<sup>21</sup> While there are official opposition parties, they tend to display loyalty to the government as soon as they are in Parliament.<sup>22</sup> Opposition parties have also encountered intimidation – allegedly from the government. The Democratic Green Party was founded in 2009 with the aim of contesting the 2010 presidential elections. However, it was prevented from registering and its vice-president, Andre Kagwa Rwisereka, was found dead and party leader, Frank Habineza, went into exile for two years. By the time the party was officially recognised and registered in Rwanda – a process that took four years – it was also too late to participate in the 2013 parliamentary elections.

Data from the 2015 Ibrahim Index of African Governance shows that Rwanda has made remarkable progress since 2000, the year Kagame became president, with its overall score increasing by 12.8. Although the country started from a low baseline due to the after-effects of the 1994 genocide, this is still a notable achievement.<sup>23</sup> However, while an examination of the index's four conceptual categories – safety and rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development – shows improvement in all of these areas, it also suggests uneven prioritisation. It is a useful exercise to compare Rwanda's scores with those of other countries on the continent.

Under Kagame, Rwanda embarked on a massive reform drive in its economy, business and development sectors. Its progress in these has been nothing short of remarkable, and the country is rightfully among the top 10 African states in the categories of sustainable economic opportunity and human development. In the past 10 years it has also moved up 77 places and is now ranked 62<sup>nd</sup> in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Index rankings.<sup>24</sup> Kagame's regime was also able to stabilise the country after the devastating civil war. Improvements in security mean that Rwanda is now 12<sup>th</sup> on the continent in the category of safety and rule of law. But these improvements seem to have come at the expense of democracy and human rights. Although an improvement was achieved under participation

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20 Gruzd S & Y Turianskyi (eds), *African Accountability: What Works and What Doesn't?*, SAIIA (South African Institute of International Affairs), 2015.

21 BBC, 'A Rwanda election: RPF wins parliamentary landslide', 17 September 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24132887>, accessed 27 February 2017.

22 DW (*Deutsche Welle*), 'Fighting for recognition: Political opposition in Rwanda', 9 September 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/fighting-for-recognition-political-opposition-in-rwanda/a-18703252>, accessed 23 September 2016.

23 Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 'Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2000–2015', <http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag/data-portal/>, accessed 21 October 2016.

24 World Bank, 'Doing business: Economy ratings', <http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings>, accessed 23 September 2016.

and human rights as well, the country currently ranks 28<sup>th</sup> in Africa (see Table 2). Further examination of the Ibrahim Index sub-categories reveals an even more disconcerting picture.

Thematic area	2000 score	2015 score	Change	Rank in Africa (out of 54)
Overall	49.5	62.3	+12.8	9
Safety & rule of law	57.1	61.5	+4.4	15
Participation & human rights	40.8	51.6	+10.8	28
Sustainable economic opportunity	51.2	65.1	+13.2	5
Human development	48.1	71.2	+23.1	5

Source: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 'Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2000–2015', <http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag/data-portal/>, accessed 21 October 2016

As Table 3 shows, while Rwanda is first in Africa in terms of gender promotion, it fares significantly worse in terms of rights and is virtually at the bottom of the list in terms of participation. A further look at the indicators that inform the sub-categories reveals that the latest score for human rights in Rwanda is 0, which represents a -25.0 regression since 2000.

Sub-category	2000 score	2014 score	Change	Rank in Africa (out of 54)
Participation	12.4	19.3	+6.9	47
Rights	33.1	34.5	+1.4	39
Gender	61.8	85.0	+23.2	1

Source: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 'Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2000–2014', <http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag/data-portal/>, accessed 23 September 2016

Concerns about Rwanda's increasing authoritarianism have escalated following the Parliament's approval of a constitutional amendment in 2015 that allows Kagame to run

for three additional terms.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, Rwanda has been accorded 'not free' status in the Freedom in the World Index, which indicates that the country is on a downward trend.<sup>26</sup> In response to pressure from the international community Kagame defended himself by saying, 'What is happening is [the] people's choice.'<sup>27</sup> The 2003 constitution already granted extensive powers to the president, including the authority to appoint the prime minister and dissolve the bicameral Parliament. However, it imposed a two-term limit on the head of state's seven-year stay in office. The change allows Kagame to potentially stay in power until 2034. He officially took office in 2000 but had been the country's *de facto* leader since 1994, when he served the dual roles of vice president and minister of defence.

Thus, while it is important to commend Rwanda on achieving levels of gender equality in its Parliament that are unprecedented either elsewhere in Africa or globally, it is equally important to recognise the limitations members of Parliament (MPs) face under what is seen to be an increasingly authoritarian regime.

How does having a female-majority Parliament affect other women in Rwanda? Gender inequality is at the root of the systemic challenges that women in Africa face, resulting in their exclusion and marginalisation in all spheres of life.<sup>28</sup> The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Country Review Report of Rwanda (2005) found that 'despite tremendous progress women still face societal discrimination'.<sup>29</sup> This included the 'prohibition of an unmarried woman from inheriting property in the event of the death of a man with whom she cohabited'.<sup>30</sup> Although recent laws and policies have increased women's rights to inherit land, own matrimonial property and make decisions in matters of family property, barriers remain.<sup>31</sup> These include a lack of access to information and discrimination by state officials.<sup>32</sup> The Rwandan government has since taken a stronger stance on gender-responsive legislation. This is evidenced by the 2013 Land Law, the law to combat gender-based violence that was passed in 2006, and the 2012 legalisation

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25 *Daily Nation*, 'US condemns Kagame third term resolution', 19 November 2015, <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/US-condemns-Kagame-third-term-resolution/1066-2961830-968314z/index.html>, accessed 27 February 2017.

26 Freedom House, 'Freedom in the world 2016', <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>, accessed 1 October 2016.

27 McVeigh T, 'Rwanda votes to give President Paul Kagame right to rule until 2034', *The Guardian*, 20 December 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/20/rwanda-vote-gives-president-paul-kagame-extended-powers>, accessed 28 November 2016.

28 Nyirinkindi L, 'Gender Equality and the African Peer Review Mechanism', UNECA (UN Economic Commission for Africa), 2016.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 UN Women, 'Making land laws work better for women in Rwanda', 22 June 2012, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2012/6/making-land-laws-work-better-for-women-in-rwanda#sthash.c0UK0xFj.dpuf>, accessed 26 November 2016.

32 *Ibid.*

allowing abortion in cases of 'sexual assault, rape, incest and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother'.<sup>33</sup>

One of the biggest achievements of Rwanda's female-dominated Parliament was the passage of a gender-based violence law in 2006. This legislation criminalised marital rape and laid the groundwork for establishing centres where women can report abuse and seek medical help or shelter. It was also one of the few times when legislation was initiated and passed by Parliament, rather than through it by the president's office. Rwanda's Parliament does not, however, automatically promote women's interests in all policy instances, despite the strong presence of female MPs. An illustrative example is its decision to reduce maternity leave from three months to six weeks, which was widely criticised by women's rights activists in the country. It is also notable that many of Rwanda's gender laws were passed prior to the adoption of the 2003 constitution, which paved the way for the female-majority Parliament.

While Rwanda is cited as a model of gender inclusiveness in politics, gender equality in the country as a whole remains a work in progress. Efforts to implement national policies regarding gender equality prove difficult, and some laws have gaps that restrict progress. Women parliamentarians continuously push through barriers of gender inequality in the country by establishing organisations dedicated to advancing the plight of women in society. The Forum of Women Parliamentarians (Forum des Femmes Rwandaises Parlementaires, or FFRP) was created in 1996 and is a consultative mechanism for facilitating gender integration within the Parliament; all women parliamentarians are automatically members of the forum. Its general objective is to increase the capacity of women MPs. In 2005, under the leadership of its president, MP Judith Kanakuzwe, the FFRP adopted a five-year strategic plan to guide its activities through 2009 and reach its goal of developing policies, laws and programmes that ensure gender equality.

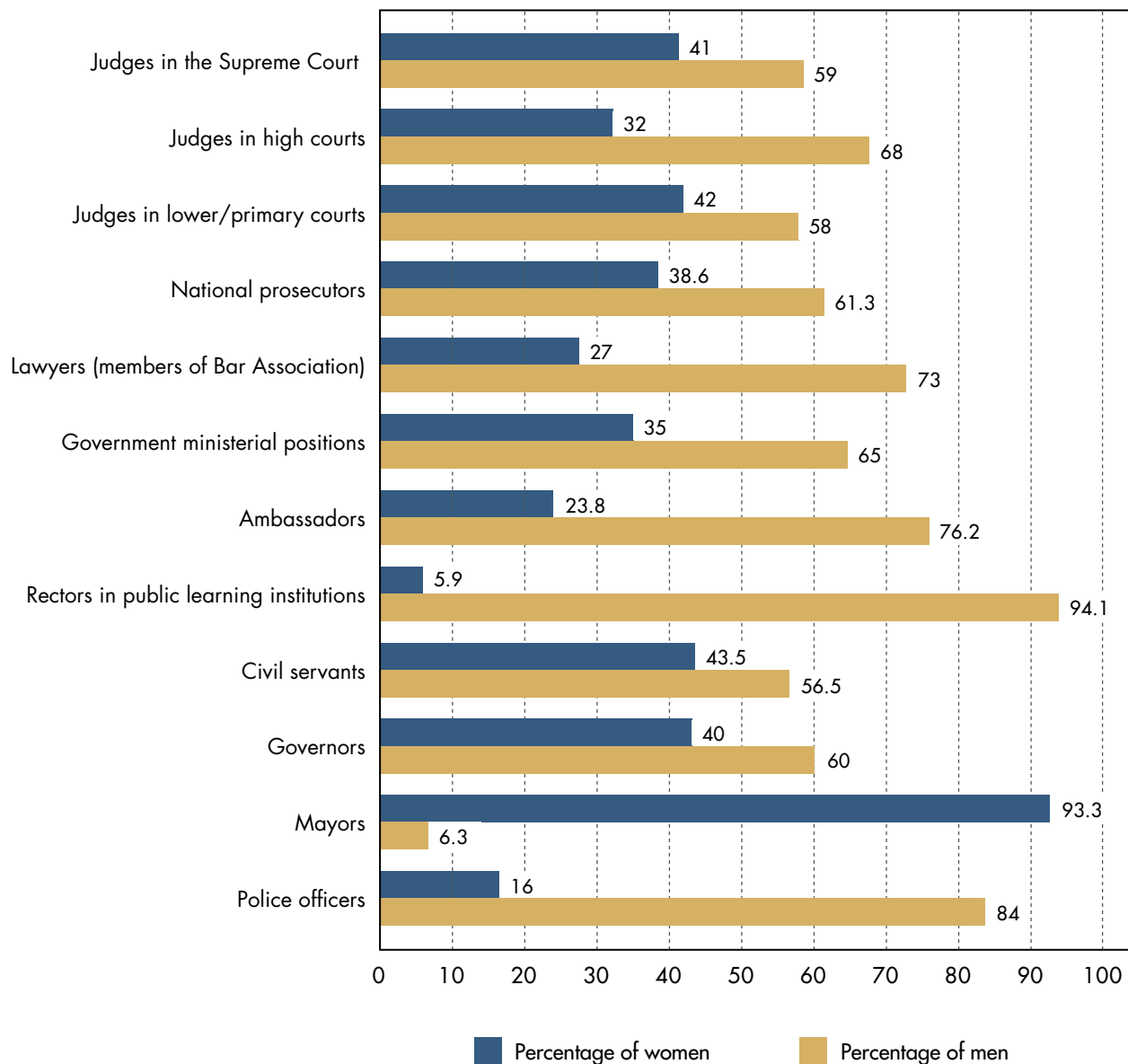
Despite the success of the FFRP in pushing through gender-focused legislation, it is still difficult for women to create laws or change policy, but this has more to do with the structure of the government than gender inequality. Although Parliament has amended laws and policies, the executive branch holds most of the power in Rwanda.

Since 2003 Rwanda has allocated a gender-responsive budget to different ministries. This is intended to assist them in implementing programmes promoting gender equality. In 2008 the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) launched a gender-responsive budgeting programme to ensure that all budget agencies in Rwanda develop gender budget statements. MIGEPROF organises regular workshops to enhance the skills of MPs to deliver on their duties of oversight and promote gender mainstreaming in various national development programmes. However, there are still concerns about the coordination of these organisations and the division of responsibilities between different stakeholders. As a result, general progress has been slow.

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33 Kane G, 'When Abortion Is a Crime: Rwanda', *Ipas*, July 2015, <https://binged.it/2lLEm4E>, accessed 27 February 2017.

**FIGURE 1** PERCENTAGES OF MEN AND WOMEN IN SELECTED HIGH-PROFILE JOBS



Source: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 'National Gender Statistics Report, 2013', <http://statistics.gov.rw/sites/default/files/publications/1f4bb8aa-f354-40d1-98c6-615e0144c143/National%20Gender%20Statistics%20report,%202013.pdf>, accessed 25 October 2016

Parliament represents only one aspect of political life in a country. It is also worth investigating whether Rwandan women are sufficiently represented in other high-profile offices, particularly in political and judicial roles.

Figure 1 is based on selected statistics from Rwanda's 2013 National Gender Statistics Report. This is a major improvement from 1990, where women represented only 1% of councillors (leaders at the sector level), and 1994, when there were still no female mayors in the country.<sup>34</sup> While still male-dominated, it is clear that a number of sectors in Rwanda are making important strides towards gender balance. Others, however, such as the Bar Association, diplomatic corps, public learning institutions and police, still have a way to go: Gender parity does not happen overnight, and it is a commitment that needs to be backed by political will.

<b>TABLE 4</b> GENDER ♀♂ IN EDUCATION IN RWANDA (2014)		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Female ♀</b>	<b>Male ♂</b>
Enrolment in primary education	1 214 190	1 180 484
Enrolment in secondary education	279 209	255 503
Enrolment in tertiary education	33 879	42 750

Source: Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Education, '2014 Education Statistical Yearbook', March 2015, [http://www.mineduc.gov.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf\\_files/2014\\_Education\\_Statistical\\_Yearbook\\_.pdf](http://www.mineduc.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf_files/2014_Education_Statistical_Yearbook_.pdf), accessed 26 September 2016

A useful step towards achieving gender parity is prioritising education to empower women. Education is key to the process of human-centred development.<sup>35</sup> There are two main types of education: formal and informal. Formal education typically takes place in schools, universities and colleges; informal education refers to what is learnt in the home, at social gatherings and community outreaches, and through local council programmes. Formal education is often key in breaking through cultural barriers that prevent women from taking political office, but there are still other obstacles that may take longer to overcome. Commendably, Rwanda has made significant strides in improving formal education access for women. It is compulsory for all children to attend primary and secondary school, in a

34 Hogg N, 'Women's participation in the Rwandan genocide: Mothers or monsters?', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 92, 877, 2010, p. 74.

35 Browne AW & HR Barrett, 'Female education in sub-Saharan Africa: The key to development?', *Comparative Education*, 27, 3, 2006.

nine-year cycle of basic education.<sup>36</sup> As a result, Rwanda has the highest primary school enrolment rates in Africa.<sup>37</sup> In 2015 sub-Saharan Africa made the most progress in primary

school enrolment out of all developing countries (with a 86% increase between 1990 and 2015).<sup>38</sup> Rwanda contributed greatly to this, as its general enrolment rate grew from 56% in 1999, a few years after the genocide, to a female enrolment rate of 98% and a male enrolment rate of 95% in 2015.<sup>39</sup> Table 4 shows that while young men clearly dominate enrolment numbers in tertiary education, girls and young women already have a slight advantage in both primary and secondary education, indicating that this situation may change in the short- to medium-term future.

In Rwanda's 2005 APRM Country Review Report, the government's official response to criticisms of the status of women was that<sup>40</sup>

they must contend with the sociological and cultural values of the society, which have tended to place women under men. In addition, the limited formal education and skills development of women have placed them, in general, at a disadvantage in dealing with men and even in advocating for their own improvement and empowerment.

However, it is clear that major strides have been made in the past decade. The 2015 Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women shows progress in access to formal education for women and the adoption of the necessary legislation to ensure enhanced gender parity. The report also states, 'Increased investment by the government in raising awareness on gender equality and the elimination of gender-based discrimination has resulted in significant improvement of people's attitudes on the role of women and girls in society.'<sup>41</sup>

Survey data supports these claims. Figure 2 shows the percentages of households in which the woman, the man or both decide on how incomes are disposed of. It is telling that in the majority of cases – 65% in the case of the husband's income and 66% in the case of wife's income – both decide on how the money should be spent. Given that money is often at the root of family conflict, it is significant that two-thirds of Rwandan couples jointly

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36 *The Guardian*, 'Lessons from Rwanda's female-run institutions', 1 July 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jul/01/lessons-rwanda-female-run-institutions-mps>, accessed 1 September 2016.

37 UNICEF (UN Children's Fund), 'Education in Rwanda', <http://www.unicef.org/rwanda/education.html>, accessed 1 November 2016.

38 UNESCO, 'Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2000–2015: Regional overview: Sub-Saharan Africa', 2015, [http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/regional\\_overview\\_SSA\\_en.pdf](http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/regional_overview_SSA_en.pdf), accessed 14 September 2016.

39 *Ibid.*

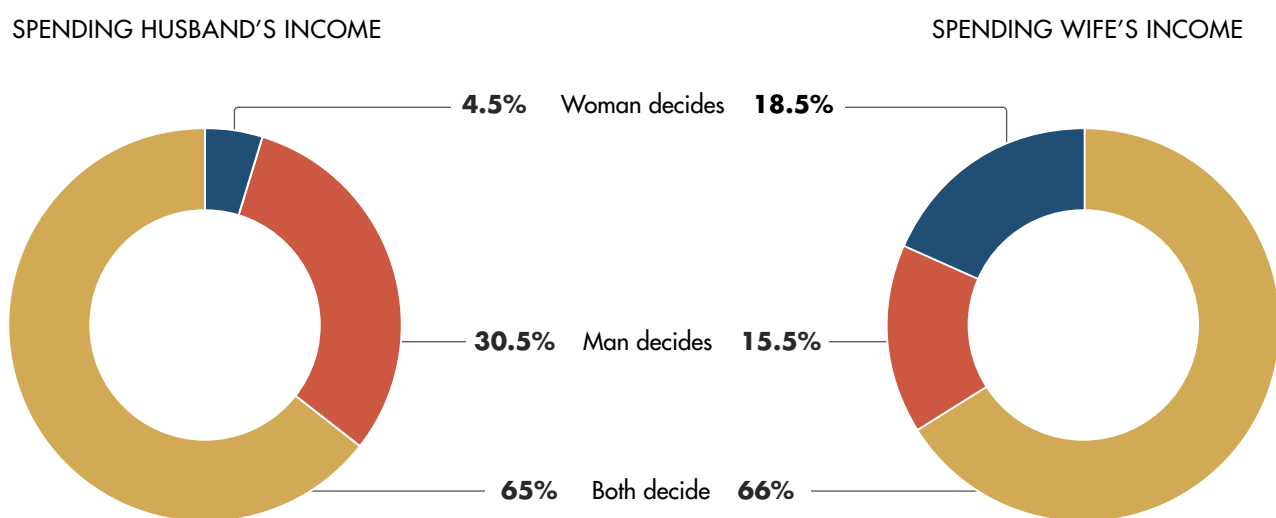
40 Nyirinkindi L, *op. cit.*

41 UN Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, 'Rwanda 2015: Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women', 5 October 2015, [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fRWA%2f7-9&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fRWA%2f7-9&Lang=en), accessed 28 November 2016.



decide on how it will be spent. Women are also more empowered financially in other ways. For instance, they can now use their husbands' assets as collateral for loans, and government-backed funds encourage women entrepreneurs by helping women without familial resources.<sup>42</sup>

**FIGURE 2** WHO DECIDES?



Source: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 'National Gender Statistics Report 2013', <http://statistics.gov.rw/sites/default/files/publications/1f4bb8aa-f354-40d1-98c6-615e0144c143/National%20Gender%20Statistics%20report,%202013.pdf> Source, accessed 25 October 2016

## CONCLUSION

As a consequence of the distorted gender ratio caused by the genocide, the implementation of the quota system and a governmental system that both appoints and supports high-level female officials are essential to the rise of women leaders in Rwanda. However, gender equality at the societal level needs to be improved. Although the role of women is changing, their advancement into various sectors is still slow. Land inheritance is one of the biggest threats to female empowerment. Women married in common law cannot inherit land. They are also not adequately represented in high-profile jobs, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

42 *Ibid.*

Yet in spite of these challenges, Rwanda remains a positive anomaly both on the continent and globally. This is especially true in light of the fact that many African societies still do not view women as leaders. In Rwanda, the female majority in Parliament shows the country's ability to accept change and promote gender policies.

Moving forward, cultural boundaries to gender equality need to be overcome. This can be accomplished through relevant development initiatives such as education and increased access to information, including through the internet. Findings show that internet access in developing countries helps to empower women by providing them with skills, opportunities and a forum to raise grievances.<sup>43</sup> More effort also needs to be put into making sure that qualified women are afforded equal opportunities to hold high-profile jobs outside of Parliament. To achieve this, Rwanda will have to establish a constructive dialogue in society on gender equality issues.

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As a consequence of the distorted gender ratio caused by the genocide, the implementation of the quota system and a governmental system that both appoints and supports high-level female officials are essential to the rise of women leaders in Rwanda

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43 New Vision, 'Gender equality goes online; women call for equal Internet access', [http://www.newvision.co.ug/new\\_vision/news/1410719/gender-equality-goes-online-women-equal-internet-access](http://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1410719/gender-equality-goes-online-women-equal-internet-access), accessed 14 September 2016.



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