TIMELINE
Major Historical Events and the Rise of Women’s Leadership

11th–19th centuries: Rwanda organized into kingdoms. Feudal structure, with general distinctions between farmers (Hutu), herders (Tutsi), and hunter-gatherers (Twa).

Late 1800s: Tutsi King Kigeri Rwabugiri establishes unified state with centralized military.

1885: Berlin Conference divides Africa, giving the region of Rwanda to Germany.

1890: Rwanda and Burundi (Ruanda-Urundi) becomes part of German East Africa.

1895–1931: Nyirayuhi V Kanjogera is Queen Mother, then regent, during the reign of her son.

1916: During World War I, Allies capture German East Africa. Belgians occupy the region.

1923: League of Nations grants Belgium mandate. It rules Rwanda and Burundi through Tutsi kings.

1933: Belgian census categorizes population based on height, shape of nose, and color of eyes. Colonists issue identity cards distinguishing Rwandans as Tutsi (15 percent), Hutu (80 percent), or Twa (1 percent).

1957: Hutus issue manifesto calling for a voice proportionate to their presence.
1959: Hutu Power movement, self-described as “social revolution.” Some 150,000 Tutsis flee to neighboring states following ethnic violence.

1961: Rwanda proclaimed a republic, amid rising nationalism and Africa’s rejection of colonialism.

1962: Independence from Belgium. New president Gregoire Kayibanda is Hutu. Many Tutsi families flee the country.

1964: Madeleine Ayinkamiye appointed minister of social affairs and public health, becoming first-ever woman in a cabinet position in Rwanda.

1965: First woman elected to Parliament, A. Mukakayange.

1973: Military coup led by Major General Juvénal Habyarimana ousts President Gregoire Kayibanda. Powerful clan connected to Habyarimana’s wife rises to influence as Agathe becomes first lady.

1973: Continued ethnic violence. Tutsi students purged from universities; quotas restrict Tutsi employment.


1986: Rwandan exiles, largely Tutsi, living in Uganda form the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), with political chapters throughout the diaspora.


1991: Adoption of new constitution and end of one-party political system. President Habyarimana’s ruling Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND) continues to dominate, but other parties emerge and some of their representatives are appointed to government.

1992: President Habyarimana creates new Ministry of Family and Women’s Development.
1992: Women activists hold first-ever public demonstration, the Women’s March for Peace, calling for talks and protesting the arrest of Tutsi women, whom the government accuse of being part of the RPF because of their ethnicity.

1992: Activists create Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe, which will become the country’s largest network of women’s rights organizations.

1993: Agathe Uwilingiyimana becomes the country’s first female prime minister, and only the third ever in Africa. She is targeted politically and physically throughout her career.

August 1993: President Habyarimana and the RPF sign the Arusha Accords, which mandate a power-sharing government. The United Nations deploys 2,500 troops to oversee implementation.

April 6, 1994: Habyarimana dies when his plane is shot down as it comes in for a landing in Kigali.

April 7, 1994: House-to-house killings of Tutsi and moderate Hutu politicians by the Forces Armées Rwandaises and allied Interahamwe. Prime Minister Uwilingiyimana, a Hutu in the political opposition, her husband, and their children murdered at their home.


April–July 1994: In one hundred days, 800,000 killed. Two million flee fearing retribution, most crossing into eastern Congo.

July 1994: Rwandan Patriotic Front captures the capital, Kigali.


1996: Genocide Law categorizes offenses and sentences for crimes committed during the genocide. Following riveting testimony from women who were sexually tortured, final law classifies rape among the gravest offenses.

1996: Countrywide women’s councils elevate female perspectives in governing and social policy making.


September 2, 1998: First case decided for ICTR and first person ever tried for rape as a crime of genocide. Jean-Paul Akayesu found guilty. The prosecution relied on testimonies of women from Taba, where Akayesu was mayor.

1999: Extensive advocacy by women in Parliament and civil society. Government adopts Inheritance Law so husbands and fathers can pass on property to their wives and daughters.

2000: Countrywide gacaca courts, grassroots justice process, designed to try hundreds of thousands accused of role in genocide.


2001: Some 35 percent of newly elected gacaca judges are women.

2002: Gacaca courts begin.

August 2003: New constitution promulgated after consultation led by a commission of twelve drafters, three of whom are women. Enshrines equality between ethnic groups and between men and women. Women must hold at least 30 percent of government decision-making posts.


2005: Land reform requires legally married couples to jointly register property.
2008: Parliament approves Gender-Based Violence Law. Mandates strict punishments for all sexual violence, including domestic abuse.

2008: Female members of Parliament now in women-only seats vie in general election. First country in the world with female majority, at 56 percent.

2009: Nine-year basic education policy makes primary school plus three years accessible to all. Particular push for girls.

2013: Women in Parliament rate soars to 64 percent when major political parties put forth equal numbers of female and male candidates.