

Special Edition on Kirehe District

RWANDA Dispatch

JANUARY - MARCH 2026, ISSUE 84 AN INSIGHT INTO RWANDA

Growth momentum and the forces powering **RWANDA's** economy



One-On-One with Bruno Rangira the Mayor of Kirehe District
From food basket to logistics hub, Kirehe is shaping its future
PG19



HOW LOCAL ENTERPRISE GAVE RISE TO FIVE PARADISE HOTEL | PG30
FROM ONE GOAT TO A LEGACY: THE JOURNEY OF SIKUBWABO SIRIRO | PG44

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TO EXPRESS VIEWS WRITE TO:

Dispatch
RWANDA
AN INSIGHT INTO RWANDA

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Publisher's Note

We enter the year 2026 with renewed vigor, an opportunity to assess progress, reaffirm priorities and spotlight local stories that reflect Rwanda's development journey.

This edition examines how Rwanda's economy continues to demonstrate resilience and ambition. Noticeable performance across services, industry and agriculture has reinforced confidence among investors and development partners, even amid a complex global environment.

However, the spotlight is on Kirehe District as a microcosm of the country's broader growth story. Statistics consistently

point to steadfast progress, consolidating gains in productivity, infrastructure, health and education.

Kirehe stands out as a compelling example of how policy translates into tangible impact on ground. In our exclusive interview, the Mayor of Kirehe describes a district undergoing steadfast transformation, driven by infrastructure expansion, targeted social investments and a clear development vision. From improved road networks and irrigation schemes to enhanced public service delivery, the district's leadership is focused on unlocking local potential and improving the quality of life for residents.

The district's emerging business landscape tells a similarly encouraging story, its now home to a growing number of enterprises, ranging from agro-processing and trade to services. Small and medium-sized businesses are flourishing alongside larger investments and its strategic location helps link production zones to regional and cross-border markets.

Education is another area where Kirehe is gaining national recognition. Strong performance in national examinations, coupled with sustained investment in school infrastructure and teacher support, underscores a firm commitment to

human capital development. This focus on education is improving learner outcomes while laying the foundation for a skilled workforce to sustain future growth.

Expanded irrigation, modern farming practices and increased land productivity in Kirehe are transforming the sector from subsistence to a more commercial orientation.

Lastly, we thank our audience for their continued trust and invite you to explore this edition, capturing both the optimism of a new year and the real progress already underway.

EDITORIAL

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said and Quoted



"AI can help teachers teach better, students learn faster, and governments make smarter investments in education."

Joseph Nsengimana, Rwanda's Minister of Education



"More women in leadership is not only the right thing to do — it's the smart thing."

Soraya Hakuziyaremye, Governor of the National Bank of Rwanda



"With the right leadership, skills, and unity, Africa can become the architect of its own destiny."

Thabo Mbeki, Former President of South Africa



"My aim is to make sure that the Rwandan people build themselves and get out of poverty."

Sina Gérard, Serial Entrepreneur and Founder of Urwibutso Enterprises



On the
world
scene

The deadly Hong Kong fire, the city's worst since 1948, left lives lost and buildings destroyed, becoming the defining image of the disaster. [November 26, 2025. REUTERS]

Numbers that speak volumes

8
PERCENT

TEENAGE PREGNANCY IN RWANDA CLIMBED TO 8% IN 2025, UP FROM 5% IN 2020, MEANING NEARLY ONE IN TWELVE GIRLS AGED 15-19 HAS BEEN PREGNANT. THE INCREASE, CAPTURED IN THE LATEST DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEY (2025), RAISES CONCERNS OVER MATERNAL HEALTH, SCHOOL DROPOUT, AND LONG-TERM SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES.

60
PERCENT

EMERGENCY VACCINATION CAMPAIGNS CUT OUTBREAK-RELATED DEATHS BY NEARLY 60% BETWEEN 2000 AND 2023, DEMONSTRATING THEIR LIFE-SAVING IMPACT DURING HEALTH CRISES BY AVERTING 5.81 MILLION INFECTIONS, 327,000 DEATHS AND 14.6 MILLION DISABILITY-ADJUSTED LIFE YEARS. THE RESPONSE EFFORTS ALSO PREVENTED MILLIONS OF INFECTIONS AND GENERATED AT LEAST \$32 BILLION IN ECONOMIC BENEFITS, UNDERSCORING VACCINES AS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND COST-EFFICIENT TOOLS IN OUTBREAK CONTROL.

\$14,400
DOLLARS

PINEAPPLES WERE ONCE A SYMBOL OF WEALTH AND STATUS THAT IN MID-17TH-CENTURY BRITAIN, AN AFFLUENT ARISTOCRAT COULD EXPECT TO SPEND £60 FOR ONE PINEAPPLE — EQUIVALENT TO ABOUT \$14,400 TODAY. THIS EXOTIC LUXURY FRUIT WOULD ALSO BE IMPORTED FROM THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS TO AMERICAN COLONIES IN THE 1700S, A SINGLE PINEAPPLE COST OF AS MUCH AS \$8,000 IN TODAY'S MONEY.

\$11
BILLION

THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FUND SECURED A RECORD \$11 BILLION FOR ITS 17TH REPLENISHMENT—23% HIGHER THAN THE PREVIOUS ROUND—MARKING THE LARGEST MOBILISATION IN ITS HISTORY. FOR THE FIRST TIME, 23 AFRICAN COUNTRIES CONTRIBUTED \$182.7 MILLION, A FIVE-FOLD INCREASE, SIGNALING A DECISIVE SHIFT FROM AID DEPENDENCE TO AFRICAN-LED, INVESTMENT-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT.



Dear Editor,

The article published in your magazine's July 2025 edition, titled "Rwandan Women on Gains: Women's Empowerment Boosts National Development," offered a powerful reflection on how far Rwanda has come in advancing gender equality.

The rise of women from political margins to holding 68% of parliamentary seats is no small achievement. The stories of women leaders in business, health, sports, and civil society show how inclusive policies can unlock national potential and deliver tangible gains for families and communities.

Yet this achievement should not breed complacency, structural barriers persist—particularly in access to capital, decision-making power in the private sector, and equal opportunities at the grassroots. Celebrating gains must go hand in hand with confronting what remains unfinished.

True empowerment is sustained not by milestones alone, but by continuous reform and vigilance.

Sincerely,

William Butera



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Catholic Faith in Rwanda, 125 Years On

Rwanda on December 6 celebrated 125 years of the Catholic Church's presence, a milestone that coincides with the global 2025 Christianity Jubilee. The national ceremony at Amahoro Stadium brought together Prime Minister Justin Nsengiyumva, senior officials, and church delegations from neighboring countries and Europe.

Delivering Pope Leo XIV's message, Apostolic Nuncio Arnaldo Sanchez Catalan said the Holy Father thanked God for 125 years of Christianity in Rwanda and honored the first missionaries who helped the faith take root. The Pope encouraged Rwandan Christians to remain committed to reconciliation, peace, and unity, especially for the youth seeking healing and hope.

Cardinal Antoine Kambanda of Kigali reflected on Christianity's



Cardinal Antoine Kambanda, the Archbishop of Kigali, delivers his speech during the 125th anniversary of the Catholic Church's presence in Rwanda on Saturday, December 6. Courtesy photo.

two-millennia legacy, noting that the Gospel was meant to unite. Recognizing the Church's failures during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, he said it would

not have occurred had the Church's message been truly embraced.

Cardinal Kambanda highlighted the Church's current footprint: 236

parishes, five million Catholics, over 1,100 priests, nearly 4,000 sisters, and an extensive network of schools, universities, hospitals, and social institutions.

Rwanda's economy shows stability

Economic growth accelerated to 11.8% in the third quarter of 2025, up from 7.8% in Q2, according to the National Institute of Statistics. GDP at current prices rose to Rwf 5,525 billion, from Rwf 4,659 billion a year earlier. Services remained the largest contributor at 57%, followed by industry

(22%) and agriculture (15%). Industry led growth with a 17% increase, driven by construction, manufacturing, and mining.

Agriculture grew by 10%, supported by strong export crops and fishing, while services expanded by 10%, boosted by trade, ICT, and finance.



Major Investment in East African Beer Sector

Global spirits giant Diageo agreed to sell its 65 % stake in East African Breweries Limited (EABL) to Japan's Asahi Holdings for \$2.3 billion, one of the largest foreign investments in the region's consumer goods industry.

The deal, spanning Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania is expected to retain local brands and support continued production and distribution partnerships.



Eastern Province Poised for Rwf 300 Billion Climate Investment

The Rwandan government is set to invest Rwf 300 billion (US\$205 million) in a six-year climate resilience project aimed at combating drought in the Eastern Province, particularly in Kayanza District, one of the country's most climate-vulnerable areas.

Implemented under the KIWIMP programme, the initiative will focus on expanding access to water through large-scale

irrigation. Plans are to irrigate 4,000 hectares in Ndego using modern, efficient systems designed to ensure year-round agricultural productivity.

Contracts for the project were awarded, with studies completed for 2,400 hectares and an additional 2,000 hectares under review. Construction is expected to begin early 2025, with planting scheduled for September.

New deal to expand Malaria vaccine access for millions of children

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and UNICEF in November 2025 announced a landmark pricing agreement that will make the R21/Matrix-M™ malaria vaccine more affordable, unlocking protection for up to 7 million additional

children by the end of the decade. Backed financially by Gavi and executed by UNICEF, the deal is expected to generate up to US\$ 90 million in savings, enough to secure more than 30 million extra vaccine doses over the next five years.

Under the new arrangement, the vaccine price will fall to US\$ 2.99 per dose, a reduction expected to take effect within a year. The move supports Gavi's goal of fully vaccinating 50 million more children against malaria by 2030.



Excitement takes center stage in AFCON 2025

After a four-year wait, the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) 2025 kicked off in Morocco, with 24 national team's battling it out for a record prize fund of \$10 million. Matches were played across six stadiums in different cities, highlighting Morocco's world-class football infrastructure.

Fans filled the stadiums in a thrilling display of passion and culture, waving flags, wearing team colors, and celebrating the tournament's return. Supporters from across Africa represented their countries, adding to the vibrant atmosphere with chants, songs, and traditional dances.

The four-year gap heightened anticipation, and every match was closely watched as teams competed for continental glory, showcasing Africa's football talent and rich cultural diversity.



Landscape Management Set for \$9.2 Billion Investment



Rwanda will invest an estimated \$9.2 billion between 2025 and 2050 to implement the Sustainable Landscape Management Investment Framework (SLM-IF), approved by Cabinet in late November 2025. The framework aims to protect and restore soil, water, forests and biodiversity while strengthening resilience to climate change.

Developed by the Ministry of Environment and the Rwanda Green Fund, the plan promotes environmentally responsible land use, balancing agriculture, conservation and development. It responds to growing pressures from deforestation, unsustainable farming, land competition and population growth, which have accelerated land degradation and soil erosion.

eKash launched to drive a fully connected, cashless economy



Rwanda launched eKash, the National Digital Payment System to enable instant, interoperable, and cashless transactions across banks, mobile money operators, SACCOs, and fintechs. Developed by RSwitch, the platform

replaces fragmented bilateral agreements with a centralized, real-time system accessible via mobile phones.

The launch followed broad collaboration among government

institutions and development partners, marking a major step toward a fully interconnected financial ecosystem. With 96% of adults financially included, eKash enters a mature, transaction-

ready market, positioned for rapid adoption and high volumes. By reducing friction across payment channels, the system supports efficient digital finance growth and aligns with the country's ambitions.

Latest health survey shows progress and persistent challenges

The 2025 Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey (RDHS) recently released revealed continued progress in population and health outcomes, alongside areas needing attention. The total fertility rate

declined to 3.7 children per woman, down from 4.1 in the 2019–2020 survey, reflecting changing family size preferences and improved access to reproductive health services. Stunting among children

under five has dropped to 27, down from 33 % five years earlier, signaling gradual improvements in child nutrition. However, malnutrition remains a concern, particularly in some rural areas. The survey also

highlights ongoing efforts in HIV prevention and awareness, with continued testing and counselling services integrated into health programmes, underlining the importance of early detection and treatment.

Growth momentum and the forces powering Rwanda's economy

Notably, Rwanda's strong economic performance in 2025 reflects a steadfast growth trajectory, rising from 6.5% in Q1 and 7.8% in Q2 to 11.8% in Q3. This momentum has kept the country in global headlines, maintaining its position among the ten fastest-growing economies in Africa.

BY GEORGE KALISA

Rwanda's economic performance mostly in the services, industry and agriculture sectors has driven overall growth to nearly 12%, well above the 2025 projections of the African Development Bank (AfDB) of 7.1% for Rwanda and 5% for EAC member countries. The economy also outperformed the Ministry of Finance's projections of 7.1% for 2025 and 7.5% for 2026.

These gains tell a compelling story of resilience and recovery, with GDP growth reaching 11.8% in Q3 2025, according to a report released by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) in mid-December last year.

"In the third quarter of 2025, GDP grew by 11.8 per cent following growth of 7.8 per cent in Q2 and 6.5 per cent in Q1," said Ivan Murenzi, Director General of NISR, during a press briefing in Kigali on December 16.



Miners at Nyakabingo mine. Courtesy Photo.

This accelerated growth is largely attributed to increased strategic investment over recent years, marked by renewed momentum across all sectors in the post-COVID-19 period. Rwanda's economic

development trajectory would be incomplete without acknowledging the impact of expanded infrastructure development and sustained policy reforms.

At current market

prices, GDP in Q3 2025 was estimated at Rwf 5.53 trillion, up from Rwf 4.66 trillion in the same period a year before, NISR reported.

Other fast-growing African economies, according to AfDB's Macroeconomic Performance and Outlook Report released early last year, include South Sudan (34.4%), Senegal (8.6%), Uganda (7.2%), Niger (6.9%), Djibouti and Togo (6.9%), Ethiopia (6.6%), Benin (6.6%) and Côte d'Ivoire (6.3%).

Rwandans send a strong message to the world by celebrating this economic milestone, as the performance strengthens investor confidence and enhances the country's image on the global stage.

In 1994, Rwanda's GDP fell to its lowest levels, with annual GDP estimated at US\$1.418 million, representing a contraction of 41.9%, and GDP per capita at US\$223, a decline of 31.4%. The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi claimed over one million lives and left the economy in ruins.



ECONOMIC PILLARS 2025

Across all sectors, services, industry and agriculture remained the key drivers of growth. Services contributed 57% of GDP, industry 22%, agriculture 15%, while net taxes accounted for about 6%.

Industry, services and agriculture expanded by 17%, 10% and 10% respectively, with services remaining the largest contributor, according to the

country's Statistics body. Agriculture contributed 1.5 percentage points to overall growth, supported by notable increases in export crops production and fishing.

"Within agriculture, food crops production increased by 4%. The export crops production increased by 35%, livestock increased by 6% while fishing increased by 34%," said Ivan Murenzi.

This trend signals improving living

standards. According to the Labour Force Survey released by NISR in April 2025, agriculture employs 43.7% of the national workforce. With 69.1% of Rwanda's estimated 13.2 million people (2022) engaged in agriculture, the sector continues to anchor livelihoods while fueling growth.

Progress toward food security has been driven by increased productivity and expanded cultivated land. The rise in food production during

last year's Season A reflects government and development partner efforts, including adoption of improved agricultural practices, land consolidation, irrigation and climate-resilient approaches, alongside mass awareness campaigns on improved seeds and fertilizers.

Total food production reached 6.16 million metric tonnes in Season A, up from 5.95 million metric tonnes in 2024, a 3.6% increase. Cultivated land expanded by more than 50,000 hectares, with the total area under cultivation reaching 1.483 million hectares, up from 1.428 million hectares, representing a 3.9% increase, according to the Seasonal Agricultural Survey (SAS) published in 2025.

This momentum aligns with Rwanda's Vision 2050 ambition to attain upper-middle-income status by 2035 and high-income status by



2050. It also provided the backdrop for hosting the 6th Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF) Congress and Exhibition in Kigali from September 30 to October 2, 2025. The event attracted over 200 delegates, more than 20 exhibitors and high-level stakeholders from around the world.

NISR ranked agriculture as the country's top employer in the first quarter of 2025. National unemployment declined to 11.1% from 12.9% a year earlier, while the employment-to-population ratio rose to 56% and labour force participation increased by two percentage points.

In the Eastern Province, Kirehe District has benefited significantly from government initiatives, particularly solar-powered irrigation systems. Once plagued by drought and food shortages, the district has expanded cultivated land through new irrigation technologies, including the Pipe Flow system launched in February 2025. More than 2,000 farmers in Musaza, Nasho and Mpanga sectors have seen improved livelihoods following the development of Nasho Farm, which spans over 1,173 hectares.

Musaza now has over 80 hectares under irrigation, while Mpanga has reached 659 hectares. Vice Mayor for



Economic Development Modeste Nzirabatinya says irrigation has reversed migration and poverty trends.

"In Musaza and Gicuma, where irrigation was previously lacking, there has been notable progress. Many families who had fled due to food shortages have returned after gaining access to irrigation. We plan to increase the irrigated

area by at least 40 hectares to help residents thrive and prosper," Nzirabatinya said.

District authorities also announced that two irrigation projects in Muhama Sector—Mahama I and Mahama II—covering a combined 3,000 hectares, are under construction and expected to be completed by the end of 2025.

► INDUSTRY

Industry grew by 17%, contributing 3.7 percentage points to GDP growth. Manufacturing recorded a 44% increase, largely driven by higher cement production in non-metallic minerals. Metal products rose by 28%, chemicals by 25%, and food processing by 12%. The government attributes this growth to the country's





development drive and sustained demand for construction materials.

► SERVICES

The services sector grew by 10%, contributing 5.5 percentage points to GDP growth. Wholesale and retail trade expanded by 20%, while information and communication grew by 17%. Financial services, public administration, transport

and education recorded growth of 10%, 7%, 9% and 5% respectively.

► HEALTH

Although health services declined by 16%, government intensified efforts to strengthen the sector. The Ministry of Health launched the fifth Health Sector Strategic Plan (HSSP V) earlier in 2025, aimed at accelerating progress toward universal

health coverage by 2030.

Aligned with Vision 2050, the National Strategy for Transformation 2 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, HSSP V is built on extensive sector analysis and lessons from the COVID-19 response.

“HSSP V is structured around five strategic pillars and two enabling factors, encompassing 24 strategic objectives,

138 interventions and 44 priority areas. Progress will be measured using 38 key performance indicators,” the Ministry said.

Overall, 2025 stood-out as a year of tangible progress, marked by strong performance across services, agriculture and industry, reinforcing Rwanda’s path toward sustained and inclusive economic growth.



Kirehe

SPECIAL

REPORT

AKARERE KA KIREHE

STEERING DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY AND QUIET LEADERSHIP

In Kirehe District, development is rarely announced with fanfare. Instead, it is shaped in measured discussions behind modest office doors, guided by data, field visits, and close engagement with communities. At the heart of this steady progress is the District Council, an institution charged with shaping policy, enforcing accountability, and ensuring that governance responds to the lived realities of citizens.

“

Social transformation is not an abstract concept. It is reflected in whether services reach households, livelihoods improve, and governance responds to real needs.” – **Prof. Callixte Kabera, Chairperson of Kirehe District Council**



Know Kirehe District

Kirehe District is one of the seven districts in Rwanda's Eastern Province. It is situated in the south-eastern part of the country, approximately 133 km from Kigali City.

Administrative Headquarters

Nyakarambi - Kirehe Sector

Administrative Structure

► Sectors: 12 ► Cells: 60 ► Villages: 612

Population & Size

Population: Approx. 460,860 residents
Surface Area: 1,118.5 km²

Boundaries:

East: Tanzania (separated by the Akagera River)

South: Burundi & part of Tanzania

West: Ngoma District

North: Kayanza District

BY ELIE MUTANGANA

According to the Chairperson of Kirehe District Council, Prof. Callixte Kabera, the council serves as the backbone of oversight at the district level. Made up of 17 members, it monitors the performance of the executive committee while defining policy directions that underpin Kirehe's long-term transformation.

“Our responsibility is to keep people at the center of development,” Prof. Kabera observes.

“Social transformation is not an abstract concept. It is reflected in whether services reach households, livelihoods improve, and governance responds to real needs.”

To deliver on this mandate, the council operates through three standing commissions covering economic affairs, social development, and governance. But decision-making does not stop at policy formulation. Council members routinely conduct field visits to assess projects firsthand, engage residents, and evaluate whether



plans are translating into tangible change.

“We do not govern from a distance,” Prof. Kabera emphasizes. “If transformation is to be meaningful, we must see it on the ground and hear directly from the people.”

This hands-on approach also defines the council’s working relationship with the district’s executive leadership. Regular coordination meetings with the mayor, vice mayors, and the executive secretary ensure alignment across all administrative levels, from village assemblies to sector councils and district headquarters.

One of the council’s most critical roles is monitoring the district’s performance



Prof. Callixte Kabera, Chairperson of Kirehe District Council

contracts, locally known as Imihigo. Reintroduced nationally in 2006, Imihigo is Rwanda’s unique accountability framework under which government institutions publicly commit to development targets and are rigorously evaluated on results that improve citizens’ lives.

In Kirehe, progress reports are closely scrutinized and followed by field verification and audits. “Reports matter, but reality matters more,” Prof. Kabera notes. “When gaps appear, accountability must follow.”

The results reflect this discipline. In the 2024–2025

fiscal year, Kirehe District achieved an overall Imihigo score of 78.68 percent, earning a 14th-place ranking nationwide in assessments conducted by the Ministry of Local Government and the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. Momentum has continued into the current fiscal year, with the district posting a 96.8 percent achievement rate in the first half of 2025–2026.

Modeste Nzirabatinya, the Vice Mayor in charge of economic development sees the district at a critical point of transition. While governance provides the framework, he says economic development is shaping Kirehe’s future on ground.

“Kirehe aims to become



an economic hub,” he said. “That requires strategic investment in irrigation, water, energy, urban development, and trade.”

Despite recurring droughts, the district is harnessing its lakes and rivers to expand irrigation, particularly in Nasho and Mahama. Supported by national programs and environmental partners, these initiatives have already brought agricultural land under irrigation, strengthening climate resilience and improving incomes for hundreds of cooperative members.

Access to basic services remains a priority. Water coverage stands at about 80 percent, while electricity access has reached roughly 70 percent of households.



Modeste Nzirabatinya, the Vice Mayor in charge of economic development

The district has set a goal of universal access by 2029, supported by plans for a new water treatment plant and expanded rural electrification expected to connect thousands of households by 2026.

“Electricity changes everything,” Nzirabatinya

said. “It creates jobs, supports businesses, and opens space for innovation.”

Urban growth is guided by Kirehe’s newly approved master plan, which designates Nyakarambi as a city, supported by emerging urban centers such as Nasho and Kiyanzi. The plan

emphasizes orderly land use, environmental protection, and expanded tree planting.

Beyond infrastructure, the district is also leveraging culture and nature as economic assets. In partnership with Rwanda Development Board (RDB), Kirehe is promoting Imigongo art through local cooperatives, while positioning its lakes, forests, and historical sites as emerging tourism destinations.

For both the District Council and the executive leadership, the message is consistent: development must be inclusive, accountable, and rooted in local realities. In Kirehe, progress may be quiet — but it is deliberate, disciplined, and increasingly visible.



SUCCESS IN EDUCATION PREMISES ON COOPERATION BETWEEN ACTORS

Close cooperation among educators, learners, parents and local authorities has emerged as a key driver of academic success in Kirehe District, education officials told Rwanda Dispatch in an exclusive interview in early December 2025.

primary and secondary examinations, according to the 2024–2025 results released by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC).

Teachers attribute the gains in education to the current collaboration between partners and the use of education technology,

“Each teacher has a laptop, and we use iPads to reduce preparation time and improve lesson delivery,” observed Mukamugenzi Valerie, the head teacher at Group Scholaire Paysannat L D School, located near the Mahama Refugee Camp, the best performing school in O-Level, according to the Ministry of education results of 2024-2025.

BY JEJJE MUHINDE

District leaders and education practitioners say sustained investment in school infrastructure, teaching resources and the expanded use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has significantly strengthened the teaching and learning environment across the district.

These combined efforts have translated into measurable



results. Kirehe District ranked as the top performer in national

The Eastern Province district recorded a 93.01% pass rate in the Primary Leaving Examinations, while 93.1% of Senior Three students scored at least 50% in Ordinary Level Examinations

The Eastern Province district recorded a 93.01% pass rate in the Primary Leaving Examinations, while 93.1% of Senior Three students scored at least 50% in Ordinary Level Examinations.

Across Rwanda, schools generally focus on excelling at one stage of education; whether Primary or Secondary level (Ordinary Level or Advanced Level). In Kirehe District, however, schools have taken a different approach, aiming to perform strongly at each level of education. This focus on all-round achievement has delivered remarkable results in 2025.

School attendance in the district has been on the upwards trend for years. According to the 2022 national census, Kirehe District recorded the highest net attendance in primary schools countrywide, with 90% of children aged six to 11 were in school. Early childhood learning figures



Joseph Nsengimana, Minister of Education.

are equally strong, with 85.3% of children aged three to five attending nursery or kindergarten, giving them a head start in reading, writing and numeracy skills.

In the Senior Three

examinations, Mathematics emerged as the district's best performed subject, with a 46% pass rate; the highest among subjects; while English recorded an 18.91% rate.

Data from the 2022-23

Education Statistical Yearbook show that steady investment has played a major role in Kirehe's success. In just one year, the number of primary school classrooms rose from 1,724 up from 1,632 while pre-primary classrooms increased from 240 to 268.

Bruno Rangira, the Mayor of Kirehe District, said the district prioritized classroom construction in expansion drive of education infrastructure in the district.

"A good number of investments have gone into education infrastructure, and we are continuing to expand," he said.

These expansions reduce overcrowding, improve student-teacher interactions, and support learning,

He added: "We closely follow and monitor the education sector, with proactive engagement from the sector, district leadership



and school management. This helps to manage the schools in a better way and also to address pertinent issues, and challenges, work with parents, and communities to improve on discipline performance in school and during holidays,”

Attendance, he noted, has been closely tracked, “Schools have daily assessment for the students and the teachers. This reduces absenteeism,” the Mayor added.

Kirehe currently has 936 primary school teachers, translating to a pupil-teacher ratio of 116 to one. A substantial increase in the teaching staff points to efforts to strengthen staff, and ultimately improve teaching and learning.

Another factor behind the strong examinations performance is the presence of Mahama Refugee Camp, which has developed into a well-resourced education hub with support from the United Nations and partner organizations.

The refugee camp is home to more than 70,000 refugees from like Burundi, DR Congo,

Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia or Afghanistan, the camp runs structured primary and secondary schools with trained teachers and closely monitors learning programmes, often better resourced than those in the neighbourhoods, notes United High Commission For Refugees (UNHCR).

Students from Mahama contribute to the

district’s high school attendance, strong early-years participation and impressive exam results, helping Kirehe record pass rates of more than 93% in both Primary Six and Senior.

The Mayor said the schools in Mahama boast the highest enrolment with over 10,000 students.

“We have not left the education sector solely to teachers and school management,” Rangira said, “We follow up closely and work together.”

The district’s efforts were recognized during this year’s International Teachers’ Day when Kirehe District was crowned Rwanda’s best-performing district in education.

On the excellent performance of Kirehe District, Minister Nsengimana said: “That success comes from the commitment of teachers, district leaders and parents working together.”



“We have not left the education sector solely to teachers and school management. We follow up closely and work together.”



One-On-One with
Bruno Rangira
the Mayor of Kirehe District

From food basket to logistics hub, Kirehe is shaping its future

As Rwanda accelerates its journey toward Vision 2050, cities are playing an increasingly central role in driving inclusive growth. Located at a strategic crossroads bordering Tanzania and Burundi, also having a designated secondary city, Kirehe is emerging as both an agricultural powerhouse and a gateway for regional trade.

In this interview with **Bruno Rangira, Mayor of Kirehe District**, he tells Rwanda Dispatch about development priorities in his district, from irrigation and infrastructure to water access, youth empowerment, and accountable governance. He also explains how local leadership is translating national ambitions into tangible progress for communities.

Thank you, Mayor, for speaking with Rwanda Dispatch Magazine [RD].

RD: As Kirehe positions itself strategically, what key governance and leadership priorities are shaping the district's development?

Mayor Bruno Rangira

[Mayor]: Our work as a district is guided by Rwanda's broader national vision, particularly Vision 2050 and the National Strategy for Transformation (NST2). These frameworks provide a clear pathway toward achieving the country's development goals.

For Kirehe, which is predominantly agricultural, one of our top priorities is to position as a leading agricultural hub. We have made significant investments in irrigation schemes, and today we host some of the country's major food basket areas that support national food



Mayor Bruno Rangira.

security. Working closely with government institutions and local stakeholders, we are focused on increasing productivity through mechanization, expanded irrigation, and modern farming practices to ensure sustainable food production.

Given our strategic location bordering Tanzania and Burundi, we are also positioning Kirehe as a logistics hub. Tanzania serves as Rwanda's main gateway to the port of Dar es Salaam, and many goods pass through our district.

This creates an opportunity to integrate into national and regional supply chains.

Tourism is another area of potential. Kirehe has natural attractions and rich landscapes, and we are working to enhance tourism experiences while strengthening the service sector linked to tourism. As a designated secondary city, we are also prioritizing infrastructure development and planned urbanization to support economic growth and improve quality of life.

RD: Farmers in Eastern Province often raise concerns about access to fertilizers and agricultural inputs. How does Kirehe ensure transparency and fair distribution?

Mayor: We have strong systems in place to manage fertilizer and input distribution transparently. On

the supply side, we use the Rwanda Online Platform for Agricultural Inputs (ROPA), while on the demand side we use SMARK, a digital system for smart subsidies and vouchers. These platforms track inputs from suppliers all the way to farmers.

We mobilize farmers to register on time so they can access inputs efficiently. This also helps agro-dealers understand demand and plan their supply accordingly.

RD: Kirehe is expanding piped water access, how far with this initiative?

Mayor: We currently have 34 public water systems, but coverage is still low. In the short and medium term, we are working to improve and expand these systems so they can reliably supply water.

In the long term, we are working with the Ministry of Infrastructure and WASAC to establish a water treatment plant in Kirehe. Studies have been completed, and we are now mobilizing resources for construction. This will be a lasting solution to meet growing water demand.

RD: What are the



latest infrastructure developments in the district?

Mayor: Electrification is one of our biggest projects. We have reached between 78 and 79 percent electricity coverage, and with ongoing projects including solar solutions, we expect to reach close to 100 percent access in the near future.

We are also developing physical plans for settlements in urban and peri-urban areas to support orderly urbanization as a secondary city. In terms of roads, we have completed one kilometer in Nyakarambi, finalized studies for more than 10 kilometers of urban roads, and are mobilizing funding for construction.

Additionally, we are constructing approximately

18 kilometers of road linking the Rusumo–Kayonza highway to Mahama refugee camp, supporting both MINEMA and access to Akagera National Park. In health and education, we have expanded Kirehe Hospital with a modern operating theatre, completed two TVET schools, and are constructing a new health center in Nyarubuye.

RD: With a population of about 460,000 and limited land, is that a governance challenge ?

Mayor: I do not see population growth as a challenge if it is productive. In fact, it can become a demographic dividend. One of the main challenges we face is climate-related drought, which can affect productivity, but we are addressing this through

irrigation and resilient agricultural practices.

RD: How is the district supporting vulnerable households in the fight against poverty and malnutrition?

Mayor: First of all, we are implementing the national poverty reduction strategy, which focuses on targeted support for households below the poverty line through social protection and employment opportunities. The results are encouraging. According to the 7th Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV7), poverty in Kirehe has declined from 26.5 to 14 percent.

This progress is driven by targeted interventions such as improved agriculture, access to inputs, livestock





distribution, and income-generating activities. We have also expanded health services, with over 46 health posts, 19 health centers, and one hospital. Our aim is to have a health post in every cell. We are improving efficiency through partnerships and increasing the number of trained community health workers to enhance service delivery.

RD: What are you doing to empower youth, particularly in skills development?

Mayor: Kirehe has a large youth population, and we are actively engaging them through youth forums, volunteer programs in agriculture, and cooperative formation. We encourage young people to enroll in short technical and vocational courses, particularly through

our TVET institutions, to equip them with practical skills for employment and entrepreneurship.

RD: How does the district promote investment and private sector engagement?

Mayor: We work closely with the private sector through urban development projects such as the Nyakarambi Modern Market, which has attracted over 200 private investors. This project will transform our town from small shops to organized market spaces, accommodation facilities, and shopping centers.

We are also developing plans for an industrial zone. There is strong demand from industries seeking space for factories and warehouses, and we are collaborating with the Ministry of Trade

and Industry and other stakeholders to facilitate land access for investors.

RD: Accountability and transparency are often key concerns. How does Kirehe address them?

Mayor: Accountability and transparency are central to our governance approach. We have clear evaluation mechanisms, enforce policies at all administrative levels, and hold accountable leaders who do not deliver.

We maintain regular communication with citizens, cooperatives, the private sector, and the district council. Every semester, we meet with councils at cell, sector, and village levels, and each year organize a council week to review progress and respond to citizen concerns. Weekly village

meetings and community outreach activities allow us to stay closely connected to residents.

We have also disseminated a service charter outlining service standards and timelines. Citizen complaints are handled by governance officers at sector level and an ad hoc district team that ensures timely and comprehensive responses.

RD: Finally, as Kirehe enters a new phase of growth, what message would you like to share about the district's future?

Mayor: This is an exciting time for Kirehe. Being designated a secondary city has opened up significant opportunities, and we are already seeing major investments in agriculture, infrastructure, water, and electricity.

I call upon our residents, the private sector, civil society, and all stakeholders to work together so we can fully harness these opportunities and continue moving Kirehe forward in a sustainable and inclusive way.

RD: Thank you, Mayor.



BUILDING PROSPERITY WITH **BAHEZA HV SERVICES**

Empowering Communities, Inspiring Youth, and Managing Kirehe's Beating Heart of Craft and Innovation.

BY JOHN MUGISHA

In the quiet yet fast-growing district of Kirehe, a new wave of entrepreneurship is transforming lives and communities. At the center of this change stands Baheza HV Services Ltd, a company whose journey embodies Rwandan resilience, vision, and determination.

Founded by Vincent Habiyaemye, Baheza HV Services has grown from a small carpentry workshop into one of Eastern Rwanda's most trusted names in carpentry, construction materials, infrastructure development, and youth empowerment.

What began as a simple idea born of necessity has blossomed into a story of possibility, proof that great things often start small.

THE BIRTH OF A VISION

In 2012, parts of Kirehe had just been connected



Vincent Habiyaemye, Founder of Baheza HV Services.

to electricity, sparking new opportunities for innovation. Habiyaemye, a farmer turned carpenter crafting doors and furniture for local clients, saw a future others overlooked.

"I used to travel to Kigali to buy doors and other materials," he recalls. "Then I thought — why not produce and sell them right here at home?"

With little capital but unwavering determination, he began producing carpentry items locally. His craftsmanship quickly gained a reputation for quality and reliability, and soon Baheza HV Services Ltd was born — founded on the belief that local communities could build for themselves.

"I believed we could build

right where we live," he says with a smile. "If Kigali could do it, so could Kirehe."

FROM WORKSHOP TO WORKFORCE EMPOWERMENT

As the business grew, Habiyaemye's vision expanded beyond profit. He understood that real progress comes from empowering people — especially the youth, who make up the backbone of Kirehe's labor force.

In 2016, Baheza HV Services began offering practical skills training for the youth in carpentry, welding, tailoring, and entrepreneurship. Alongside technical skills, Habiyaemye emphasized financial literacy, saving, and business planning.

"I wanted others to grow with me," he explains. "When you help others succeed, your own success becomes even more meaningful."





This initiative gave rise to a cooperative formed by young artisans trained under Baheza HV Services. Today, the cooperative operates successfully across Kirehe, producing furniture and metal works while mentoring other youth.

Through this model, Baheza HV Services became more than a company — it evolved into a hands-on school of life, where work, discipline, and hope intersect.

The company also partners with TVET schools to provide internships that give students real-world experience. Many graduates have since launched their own workshops, creating a ripple effect of innovation and employment across the district.

AGAKIRO: THE BEATING HEART OF KIREHE

Kirehe District now hosts a thriving hub of enterprise at 'Agakiro ka Kirehe' — an Integrated Crafts Production Center that brings together carpenters, welders, tailors, masons, and traders among others under one roof.

Here, the sound of hammers and saws blends with the laughter of artisans and the rhythm of commerce. It is a living symbol of Rwanda's creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.

Recognizing Habiyaemye's leadership and professionalism, Kirehe District entrusted Baheza HV Services Ltd with managing Agakiro — a milestone that affirmed the company's reputation for integrity and efficiency.

Under Baheza's management, the center envisions to become a well-organized hub of productivity and innovation.



Habiyaemye wants to ensure an affordable, high-quality materials for artisans while fostering mentorship and skills transfer.

"Agakiro represents the spirit of Kirehe — hard work,



When you help others succeed, your own success becomes even more meaningful."

innovation, and community," Habiyaemye says. "Our goal is to make it a model center where skills meet opportunity and where young people can earn a living with dignity."

Beyond workshops, the district is constructing another facility within the Agakiro complex to accommodate showrooms, restaurants, and other small businesses. The initiative aims to create a self-sustaining ecosystem that generates income and drives local development.

Baheza HV Services supplies essential materials — iron bars, cement, wood, paint, nails, and glass — directly to artisans, ensuring both quality and affordability. For clients from neighboring districts, the company even offers free transport, extending accessibility and goodwill.

Today, Agakiro ka Kirehe stands as the heartbeat of this region's economic growth — a place where dreams are crafted, and livelihoods are built — one product at a time.

GROWING BEYOND BORDERS

Through consistency and professionalism, Baheza HV Services Ltd has become synonymous with trust and reliability. By 2019, it had evolved into a regional supplier of construction materials, sourcing directly from Kigali and local industries to maintain steady supply and fair pricing.

Leveraging Kirehe's strategic location as it borders the neighboring Tanzania, the CEO of Baheza HV Services introduced a smart distribution model that allowed imported goods to be offloaded directly in Kirehe instead of Kigali — reducing transport costs and positioning his company as a key supplier across Eastern Province.

The company is now preparing to actively participate in a landmark multi-billion project to develop a modern market in Nyakarambi — a bold step that highlights both capacity and confidence.

"Winning the tender for Agakiro ka Kirehe was a proud moment," Habiwaremye reflects. "It proved that local companies can deliver innovative projects with professionalism and transparency."

Today, Baheza HV Services employs over 37 people — including 25 contractual and 12 non-contractual staff — and plans to expand its vehicle fleet to enhance service delivery across Rwanda.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES, NOT JUST STRUCTURES

At its core, Baheza HV Services Ltd stands for shared prosperity. Beyond business, the company invests in community welfare — supporting vulnerable families by paying community based health insurance and helping build homes for the needy.



"When you give back, the community grows stronger — and so does your business," Habiwaremye underscores.

Having grown up in a humble farming family, he leads with compassion and discipline. He constantly reminds his team that saving is the foundation of progress.

"If you save, you can invest," he says. "And if you invest, you can change lives."

At Agakiro, that philosophy thrives. Young artisans are encouraged to save part of their income, join cooperatives, and reinvest in their craft — turning short-term jobs into sustainable livelihoods.

As Baheza HV Services Ltd looks to the future, its mission remains clear: to build prosperity — one project, one person, and one community at a time. Plans are underway to expand services, create more youth employment, and strengthen the

company's position as a regional leader in construction and skills development.

From a small carpentry workshop to the manager of Kirehe's most dynamic craft center, Baheza HV Services Ltd stands as a testament to what hard work, integrity, and innovation can achieve.

Vincent's dream extends beyond business — it is about building a legacy of opportunity and hope.

"Great change starts with one step, one idea, and one person who refuses to give up," he says. "At Baheza HV Services, we're building prosperity brick by brick, dream by dream."



Great change starts with one step, one idea, and one person who refuses to give up."

THE ROAD AHEAD



FROM BARBECUE STALL TO BUSINESS EMPIRE: HOW **KAYITESI CONSOLATA** IS CHANGING LIVES IN KIREHE

BY JEJJE MUHINDE

It's a busy morning in Nyakarambi, Kirehe District. The pale morning sun stretches across the sky, illuminating Rwanda's eastern border town as it awakens. Shops open, traders arrange their goods, and the hum of business begins to rise, a daily rhythm that reflects Kirehe's role as a vibrant crossroads where commerce and community meet.

Situated near the Tanzanian border, Kirehe thrives on agriculture, trade, and the quiet strength of its people. Amid this bustling town stands Madam Consolata Kayitesi, one of the many unsung women traders, farmers, and entrepreneurs transforming their communities through determination and resilience.

We meet her at Comfort Villa, one of her businesses — a modest but welcoming hospitality establishment that bridges

the gap between budget lodges and hotels.

The rooms at Comfort Villa are simple yet spotless, each with private en-suite facilities. Breakfasts feature fresh fruit, eggs, bread, and Rwandan coffee, while lunch and dinner offer home-

cooked favorites like ibyishimbo (beans), isombe, rice, and grilled meats. With Wi-Fi, laundry services, and warm hospitality, Comfort Villa has become a symbol of what local entrepreneurship can achieve.

Over two decades ago, Kayitesi founded KC Services and Traders Ltd, now a diversified company with interests in hospitality, real estate, farming, and food supply. She employs dozens of locals, including fifteen staff members at Comfort Villa alone.

Her entrepreneurial journey began in 1997, in the aftermath of the genocide against the Tutsi as Rwanda was recovering. She had just returned to her homeland when she ventured into cross-border trade between



Rwanda and Tanzania — starting from nothing but determination and faith.

“I began trading fish, cassava, and other agricultural produce in Mwanza,” she recalls. “My routes stretched from Tanzania through Rusumo to Kigali, even sending goods to clients in the Democratic Republic of Congo.”

But the road was far from smooth. When Tanzania banned some products she traded, her business collapsed. As a widow, she returned to Kirehe, the place was barely a town but a rural trading centre. Unwilling to give up, she started a small bar targeting cross border travelers, she sold boiled meat — roasted chicken, beef, goat and drinks. “At that time, there were few bars and no guesthouses here,” she recalls. “I saw an opportunity and went for it.”

Still, Kayitesi longed to return to trading but lacked capital. She decided to sell the four cows her family owned, raising just enough to restart her trade. With a little help from kind friends, she resumed cross-border business — buying and reselling goods for three years. Each sale was a step forward, though not without danger. In 2005, she survived a fatal truck accident while transporting goods from Tanzania where her driver died instantly,”



she recalls quietly. “I was badly injured and spent a year recovering in Kigali. I consider myself lucky to be alive.”

When she regained her strength, fortune knocked again. In 2006, Partners in Health, an NGO opened operations in Kirehe. A friend told her — half-jokingly — about a tender to supply food items and basic goods to health facilities.

She applied and, to her astonishment, won the bid, a development that would mark a turning point in her life for the next 17 years.

But joy quickly turned to panic: she had to start deliveries in three days — with no capital and no transport. “I had promised to use a car,” she laughs, “but I didn’t even own a bicycle.”

A friend advised her to

seek financing from a bank. Fortunately, she had already registered her company and had small savings at BCDI bank (now Ecobank) and Banque Populaire. Still, she lacked collateral. Desperate, she turned to a relative in Kigali, who, after reviewing the contract, lent her Rwf 5 million instead of the Rwf 2 million she asked for.

That lifeline changed



everything. After her first month of deliveries, she received a payment of Rwf 69 million. “I remember the day I went to Bank of Kigali to withdraw the cheque,” she says with a smile. “They advised me to open an account and use it to qualify for future loans. I cleared my debt, reinvested the rest, and that’s how I truly began to grow.”

Today, Kayitesi owns commercial buildings,

farmland, and a growing hospitality brand. She credits her success to persistence, faith, and a willingness to learn. “Doing business without formal education is not easy,” she admits. “But I learned how to calculate profits, manage staff, and make decisions. That knowledge gave me a real chance to succeed.”

In recent years, Kayitesi’s business footprint

expanded even further after she won a tender to rent and operate a hospitality complex built by members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in Kirehe — a party she proudly belongs to. The facility with a modern multi-service center, she opened a bar, restaurant, accommodation, and conference halls that now serve government officials, development partners, locals and

travelers passing through the district.

Her success in managing the complex has not only elevated her company’s profile but also contributed to Kirehe’s transformation from a quiet rural area into a growing business hub. The hospitality establishment has become a center of activity, attracting visitors, creating jobs for local youth, and stimulating surrounding businesses. What was once a modest trading town is now seeing new opportunities emerge — a reflection of how grassroots entrepreneurship and local investment can drive rural development.

FUTURE PLANS

Her next goal? Building one of the best hotels in Kirehe — a project she has already secured land for.

Her message to women and youth is simple: start small, but start. “You don’t need a lot of money to begin,” she says. “If your idea is solid, you can grow it. There are institutions like BDF and other government programs that support entrepreneurs — you just need to take the first step.”

In Kirehe District, women like Kayitesi Consolata prove that when trade is open and determination meets opportunity, communities can thrive — one bold entrepreneur at a time.

How local enterprise gave rise to **FIVE PARADISE HOTEL**



BY JEJJE MUHINDE

In Kirehe's rolling hills and scenic valleys, travelers often find a place to rest and immerse themselves in the district's warm hospitality. One such place is Five Paradise Hotel, which has quickly become a favorite for visitors seeking both comfort and a genuine taste of local life.

Whether visiting region for business or leisure, Five Paradise Hotel offers a restful retreat. Located in the heart of Kirehe, the motel provides easy access to the district's rivers, wetlands, nearby lakes, and the eastern edge of Akagera National Park.

Many guests say that staying at Five Paradise Hotel feels less like checking into

an accommodation and more like being welcomed into a local family.

The motel offers furnished standard rooms, family rooms, and private single rooms, alongside a restaurant and bar. Its friendly service and calm setting make it a standout choice in the area. Designed with an eco-friendly approach, Five Paradise Hotel combines modern comfort with personalized service, setting it apart from other accommodations in Kirehe.

Guests enjoy modern amenities including free internet, ample parking, on-site dining, and garden views, all while remaining close to nature and surrounding communities.





Five Paradise Hotel, established by Philemon Bizimungu, a businessman entrepreneur and resident of Kirehe, founded the motel with a vision to create space where guests could experience both comfort and authentic local hospitality.

Born in Kirehe District, Bizimungu began his working life assisting a local clothes shop owner but knowledge of the trade inspired him to

“If we grow together, the whole district moves forward”

– Philemon Bizimungu

start his own becoming self-employed.

His turning point came in 2004, equipped with

Rwf 8,000 in savings from his first job, Bizimungu joined other traders on a trip to Kigali to see clothes supply outlets. He purchased his first stock, went back to Kirehe and after reselling the goods, made a good first profit.

The profit rejuvenated his dreams, “I went home, my family sold the harvests and together with relatives topped up my capital to Rwf 30,000,” he says with a smile.

At the same time, Kirehe District itself was changing. Farmers were increasingly embracing rice and soya production in the wetlands, while goods still flowed in from neighboring Tanzania and Burundi.

Bizimungu says the real shift came during the rice boom. As farmers in Kirehe began harvesting in large quantities, he entered the rice trade, buying directly from growers. At the time, the district had no milling machines and he would transport and sell in Kigali.”

A steady routine followed: transporting rice to Kigali and returning to Kirehe with bales of clothes to sell locally.

As his business grew, Bizimungu familiarized himself with banking services at Bank Populaire, where he secured a loan of Rwf 3 million. He purchased a



factors that enabled entrepreneurs like him to grow. He recalls making two trips to Kigali in a single day, transporting goods back and forth at a time when his home village had no electricity or telephone services. “Good governance made it possible,” he says. “You could travel safely and do business.”

He also praises district authorities for listening to residents’ needs and creating an environment where enterprise can thrive.

small truck to transport goods to districts such as Rwamagana and, as operations expanded, upgraded to a larger Fuso truck.

The profits enabled him to buy land in the center of Kirehe. Using the Fuso to transport sand and bricks, he laid the foundations for what would later become Five Paradise Hotel.

The district has transformed dramatically, he observes that through improved infrastructure, a more vibrant business environment, and Kirehe’s strategic position as a border district with Tanzania, offers added economic opportunities.

Bizimungu cites President Paul Kagame as his greatest inspiration,

“The real shift came during the rice boom as farmers in Kirehe began harvesting in large quantities.”

pointing to leadership and security as key

Today, Bizimungu advises young entrepreneurs to start small and grow steadily. At times, he supports vulnerable residents by contributing to their community health insurance, emphasizing that no one should be left behind.

“If we grow together,” he says, “the whole district moves forward.”

MAHIRANE'S CARPENTRY BECAME A CATALYST FOR CHANGE IN KIREHE



BY JEJJE MUHINDE;

In Rwanda's Eastern Province, where rolling hills meet the hum of new industry, opportunity often begins with a single spark of determination. For Celestin Mahirane, that spark came from a hammer's tap and the smell of freshly cut wood. Once a small-

scale farmer in Kirehe District, he traded his hoe for a saw — and in doing so, built one of the area's most respected furniture businesses.

In a dusty workshop in Kirehe District, the rhythmic tap of hammers and the scent of freshly cut timber mark the start of Celestin Mahirane's day. Every table, chair, or bed he crafts



When power was installed in our community and Agakiro (center of carpentry, metalwork, and trade) was built, I realized people needed good, affordable furniture. —
Celestin Mahirane

carries a story — of patience, persistence, and a keen eye for opportunity in a district once seen as purely rural.

Mahirane's journey began far from the workshop benches. He started as a small-scale farmer in Kigina Sector, tending crops on his modest plot of land. But when Kirehe began to develop — with new roads, electricity, and markets — he saw a chance to reinvent himself.

“When power was installed in our community and Agakiro (center of carpentry, metalwork, and trade) was built, I realized people needed good, affordable furniture,” he recalls. “That’s when I decided to take the risk and start my own carpentry business.”

At first, Mahirane’s workshop was simple, crafting basic household furniture for friends and neighbors. But the demand grew quickly. In 2013, after working long hours in Nyakarambi in a customer service job, he saved enough to buy space at the Agakiro complex, joining other carpenters under one roof. He says the decision changed everything.

“When carpenters work in one area, it’s easy to share ideas, tools, and customers,” he explains. “We learn from each other and improve our products.”

In a short period of time Mahirane had expanded,



buying new equipment and hiring his first employees. In 2016, he officially registered Celi Company Ltd, marking his transition from a self-taught craftsman to a business owner. He also revived his small welding business,

which he had previously operated in Kigali — now made possible by Kirehe’s new access to electricity.

The Agakiro model, he says, has been transformative. It allows small carpenters to

share machines, storage, and transport, reducing costs while ensuring their products are secure and dust-free. It also serves as a one-stop center for buyers. “Customers coming here can find everything in



bustling hub of craft, trade, and innovation — artisans pool resources, share machines, and collectively attract buyers. “Customers visiting Agakiro can find a variety of furniture in one place,” Mahirane explains. “As a company owner, it’s easier to supervise my employees, maintain quality, and even train new recruits.”



For Mahirane, this conducive working space offered both visibility and credibility. “Before, it was hard for customers to find us,” he says. “Now they know exactly where to go.” His reliable service and timely deliveries have earned him loyal clients and expanded his market beyond Kirehe.

Still, he believes there is room for more progress. He calls on the district to help artisans access local machinery and find new markets for their furniture, reducing dependence on supplies from Kigali.



CRAFTING GROWTH THROUGH CARPENTRY

As his operations grew, Mahirane began employing 15 full-time workers and recently hired more to handle increasing orders. His business supplies furniture to households, schools, and institutions across the Eastern Province. His reliable and quality services has built a reputation that keeps clients returning.

one place — from sofas to wardrobes,” he says proudly. “It’s easier for them, and better for us.”

The growth of Mahirane’s business is closely tied to Kirehe District’s efforts to create a conducive

environment for artisans. The district pioneered the establishment a shared industrial space designed to support carpenters, welders, tailors, and other craftsmen. The government’s broader policy of promoting

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and small-and medium-enterprise (SME) development has also played a vital role in nurturing such local talent.

Within Agakiro — a

His biggest breakthrough came in 2017 when his Company Celi Ltd won a contract with the Ministry of Defense to supply building materials and timber. “That contract gave my business stability,” he says. “It proved that even those of us from small towns can meet national standards.”

Today, Mahirane’s workshop produces a

wide range of quality furniture — from beds and wardrobes to dining sets and office desks. Prices remain competitive, with a finely crafted bed selling at Rwf 500,000 and full living-room sets going for around Rwf 1 million.

Looking ahead, he plans to diversify. As Kirehe plans to build a modern market in Nyakarambi, Mahirane intends to

invest up to 20% in shares to grow his reach and visibility. He also urges local authorities to help carpenters access machinery locally instead of traveling to Kigali for purchases.

Beyond personal success, Mahirane believes carpentry is a tool for empowerment. “Young people should study vocational skills,” he

says. “They are practical and can lead to self-employment. You can start small — even with nothing — and grow.”

From the soft whir of saws in his workshop to the polished furniture filling homes across Kirehe, Mahirane’s story is proof that with persistence, creativity, and community, even the humblest trade can carve out success in Rwanda’s growing economy.

As Kirehe town continues to grow from a rural outpost into a bustling commercial centre, entrepreneurs like Celestin Mahirane are shaping its new identity — one crafted from wood, hard work, and vision. His story is more than a tale of personal success; it’s a reflection of Rwanda’s broader transformation, where vocational skills and local enterprise are creating jobs, building dignity, and proving that opportunity can take root anywhere — even in the sound of a carpenter’s hammer.



AYATEKE STAR COMPANY LTD: A HOMEGROWN COMPANY TRANSFORMING RURAL WATER ACCESS

When Rwanda restructured rural water management by dissolving the former Régie des Eaux and opening the sector to private operators, a small group of experienced technicians saw an opportunity to turn reform into impact. From that transition emerged AYATEKE Star Company Ltd, a homegrown enterprise that has since become a key player in delivering safe and reliable water to rural communities.

Founded in Kirehe District and officially registered with the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) in August 2013, AYATEKE Star Company Ltd began by managing water supply services in just five sectors of Kirehe. More than a decade later, the company stands as one of Rwanda's leading private water operators, operating under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model and contributing to national goals for universal access to water and sanitation.

At the heart of AYATEKE

Star's journey is Eng. Cyprien Sebikwekwe, the company's founder and Managing Director. Born in Kirehe, Eng. Sebikwekwe holds a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering and brings decades of experience in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) as well as electricity systems. His vision was clear from the start: to drive development in underserved communities through access to clean and reliable water.

Under his leadership, AYATEKE Star has implemented transformative infrastructure



projects across Rwanda, expanding access to clean water, introducing innovative off-grid energy solutions and improving livelihoods in rural and vulnerable communities. His blend of technical expertise and entrepreneurial drive has positioned the company as a catalyst for sustainable and inclusive development.

AYATEKE Star's technical capacity first earned it a management tender in Kirehe District, which later opened doors to operations in at least 13 districts nationwide. Policy changes later led to scaling back in order to maintain a strong operational presence in few areas. Today, it manages water supply systems in Kirehe and Gatsibo districts and operates the Mahama Water Treatment Plant through a long-standing partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The Mahama facility supplies clean drinking water to more than 72,000 people in the refugee camp and the surrounding host communities, underscoring AYATEKE Star's role not only as an utility operator but also as a humanitarian partner committed to public health and dignity.

As a development partner to the district, AYATEKE plays an active role in numerous initiatives aimed at advancing local development and improving community welfare. The Managing

Director of AYATEKE Star Company also heads the Joint Action Development Forum (JADF), a multi-stakeholder platform that coordinates development efforts in Kirehe.

With a workforce of 164 permanent staff, including engineers, technicians, financial experts and support personnel, the company ensures consistent, safe and sustainable water services.

According to Jean de la Paix Hakorimana, Permanent Secretary of AYATEKE Star, the company has successfully navigated sector reforms introduced in 2023, when management contracts transitioned from districts to the Water and Sanitation Corporation (WASAC). By mid-2024, AYATEKE Star had signed new agreements, allowing it to continue operations seamlessly under the revised framework.

Beyond operations, the company has steadily diversified its services. What began as water supply management in five sectors in Kirehe has grown into a comprehensive portfolio that includes the design and construction of water systems, operation and maintenance of treatment plants, and rigorous water quality monitoring to prevent waterborne diseases and improve public health outcomes.

Financially, AYATEKE Star has demonstrated



resilience and stability. Its contracts with WASAC Utility and partnerships with development organizations such as UNHCR, WaterAid and GIZ provide a strong foundation. The company reports an average annual turnover of Rwf.2 billion, with assets valued at approximately Rwf.1billion with a culture of tax compliance. This consistent performance

has earned AYATEKE Star the Rwanda Revenue Authority's Best Taxpayer Trophy for six consecutive years—a rare distinction in the private sector.

Capacity building is another pillar of the company's impact. The AYATEKE Rural Water Management Academy has become a cornerstone for professional development in the WASH sector.





AYATEKE STAR COMPANY LTD

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Working with partners including WaterAid, Water for People, COFORWA, WASAC and GIZ (through the DeveloPPP program), the academy has trained 650 youth, 30 percent of whom are unemployed graduates. Training covers practical skills such as plumbing, pump operation, water quality testing, billing and revenue recovery, and utility management software.

Strategic partnerships have enabled AYATEKE Star Company to significantly expand its impact in the water sector. Through collaboration with WaterAid Rwanda and funding from WaterAid Japan, supported by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the company has successfully implemented three major water projects to date. Preparations are underway

for the inauguration of MOFA IV Phase I in Nasho, Kirehe District, scheduled for February, with MOFA IV Phase II set to commence in Bugesera District in April 2026.

The company has also obtained an operating license to provide water services in Zambia, marking an important milestone in its regional growth strategy.

Internationally, AYATEKE Star Company is a member of the International Water Association (IWA) and African Water and Sanitation Association or Association Africaine de l'Eau et de l'Assainissement (AfWASA). This has strengthened its profile through participation in major global WASH platforms, including the IWA Water and Development Congress & Exhibition in Kigali (2023), the World Water Congress in Toronto, Canada (2024), and the AfWASA International Congress and Exhibition in Kampala (2025).

Looking ahead, the company plans to expand into chlorine production, become a regional distributor of water technologies, and scale operations across Eastern and Southern Africa.

However, challenges remain. Vandalism of costly water infrastructure and non-payment by some consumers-including institutions continue to affect operations.

Despite these hurdles, AYATEKE Star's trajectory reflects the power of local expertise, supportive policy frameworks and purposeful partnerships. From its roots in Kirehe to its growing regional and international presence, the company's story illustrates how private enterprise can play a decisive role in delivering essential services and advancing Rwanda's development agenda.





FROM TAXI DRIVER TO BUSINESS LEADER: HOW EULADE BAYINGANA BUILT THE MATUNDA ENTERPRISE

When Eulade Bayingana first began working in Kirehe District more than two decades ago, transport was scarce, roads were quiet, and missing the last vehicle in Kigali often meant sleeping away from Kirehe. Today, Bayingana's portfolio is growing with transport, hospitality and fuel businesses whose trajectory mirrors the region's own transformation.

Bayingana is the CEO of Matunda Express, Matunda Resort Hotel, and the soon-to-be-launched Matunda Cargo. He is also completing construction of Matunda Petrol Station and Services, all strategically based in Kirehe District in Rwanda's Eastern Province.

Between 2000 and 2001, while living in what is now Ngoma District, Bayingana worked as a taxi conductor and later driver. At the time, transport services were unreliable and limited, yet he saw opportunity where others saw inconvenience. "Kirehe was not as developed as it is today," he recalls. "But I could already see potential."

Before entering business, Bayingana served as a soldier and upon retirement, he joined the transport sector. As a conductor he earned his driving licence and started building experience from the ground up. His commitment and integrity earned him trust from business leaders

and transport operators, leading to his involvement with ATRACO Express, then a major public transport company.

With ATRACO, Bayingana managed taxi parks in Kabarondo (Kayonza), Rwamagana, and Kiramuruzi (Gatsibo), before rising to

become regional manager for the Eastern Province. During this period, he introduced some of the first coaster buses serving Kirehe, improving reliability for traders, students and travelers and strengthening the district's link to Kigali.

In 2004, after years of



employment, he bought his first vehicle through savings and installment payments. A later loan from Bank allowed him to expand his fleet and open underserved but profitable routes such as Kigali-Kiramuruzi. "That vehicle earned far more than others on crowded routes," he says, underscoring the value of understanding local demand.

When ATRACO ceased operations around 2010 following regulatory challenges, Bayingana seized the moment. Armed with experience, licenses from the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA), and an initial fleet of eight vehicles, he launched Matunda Express. The name "Matunda" comes from Matunda ya Kusali "fruits of prayers" reflecting his Christian faith and belief in patience, discipline and long-term vision.

As competition intensified on major corridors, Bayingana deliberately shifted focus to Kirehe, where express transport services were still limited.

The improved connectivity supported broader



economic activity, from small businesses and other services to increased movement linked to cross-border trade and the Mahama refugee camp.

His expansion into hospitality came during the COVID-19 period, when district leaders highlighted the shortage of quality accommodation despite Kirehe's proximity to the Rwanda-Tanzania border. Built on land originally intended for staff housing, Matunda Resort Hotel now offers 20 rooms, a gym and a sauna, with plans to expand further to serve travelers, truck drivers and business clients.

Bayingana expresses

his appreciation to the Kirehe District authorities for granting him the necessary licenses and permits to construct the hotel and petrol station.

The entrepreneur is also diversifying into logistics through Matunda Cargo, currently operating three trucks, while the upcoming petrol station is expected to support both company vehicles and the wider community.

Bayingana credits Kirehe's progress to government investment, development partners, improved infrastructure and growing regional trade. He believes sustained private investment will

further cement the district's role as a transport and commercial hub linking Rwanda to regional markets.

He also acknowledges the role played by Kirehe District authorities in supporting Matunda's growth, noting that a business-friendly environment, constructive engagement with local leaders and access to serviced land and permits enabled his investments to take root. According to Bayingana, the district's openness to private investors and its emphasis on public-private collaboration have created conditions in which local enterprises can grow alongside the community.

Looking ahead, Bayingana plans to transform Matunda Express into a fleet operating exclusively new vehicles while expanding the Matunda brand into cargo transport, a clearing and forwarding agency, hospitality, and education. These investments will culminate in 2029, marking the completion of a phased growth journey that began with a single driver's determination and has grown into a diversified enterprise rooted in Kirehe's development.

His message to young people is direct and practical: "Jobs exist. Never undermine any form of work. What matters is creativity, hard work and consistency. Don't wait to be employed — start where you are and grow with your community."



PARTNERING WITH FARMERS TO MEET RWANDA'S GROWING RICE DEMAND

Rice farming is increasingly shaping rural prosperity, driven by a strong partnership between farmers and Kirehe Rice Company Ltd (KRC) in Rwanda's Eastern Province. As national demand for rice continues to rise, the company is playing a central role in strengthening farmer incomes while contributing to the country's food security ambitions.



Established in April 2012 by the Government of Rwanda, KRC was created to mill paddy produced in the marshlands of Kirehe and neighboring Ngoma district. The factory began operations in 2013 with a clear mandate: organize rice production, improve quality, and provide a reliable market for farmers cultivating the wetlands in the area as provided under the National Land Policy.

"The factory was built to support rice farmers with a guaranteed market and better incomes," said Emmanuel Niyirora, Managing Director of Kirehe Rice Company. "Today, our biggest challenge is keeping up with demand rather than finding buyers."

When government embarked on a broader

privatization drive aimed at returning state-established enterprises to the people most directly involved in their operations, KRC was progressively opened to

"The factory was built to support rice farmers with a guaranteed market and better incomes. Today, our biggest challenge is keeping up with demand rather than finding buyers"



farmer cooperatives and other stakeholders. This ensured that farmers through their organizations became shareholders alongside institutional investors. This transition strengthened local ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability.

Currently, ENAS (ETS Nkubiri Alfred & Sons) holds a 55 percent stake in the company, while the Agaciro Development Fund owns 30 percent. Farmer cooperatives collectively hold the remaining shares, led by COOPRIKI-CYUNUZI

with a 10 percent stake. ISABANE and MUSHIKIRI Rice Growers Cooperatives each own two percent, while CORIMU Kirehe holds one percent — anchoring farmers directly within the rice value chain.

According to the Manager, farmer ownership marked a turning point. "Once cooperatives became shareholders, they became true partners — committed to improving efficiency, quality, and productivity."

Today, KRC works with cooperatives representing about 8,000 rice farmers across Kirehe and Ngoma districts. Over two harvest seasons each year, these cooperatives earn an estimated 2 billion Rwandan francs per season, supporting household needs such as education, health insurance, and food security.



With Rwanda producing less than 40 percent of its domestic rice needs, expanding local production remains critical. Kirehe Rice Company mills both short-grain (kigori rice) and long-grain varieties, while ongoing research explores improved seed types comparable to imported rice.

Certified with Rwanda's Standards Mark, the company plans to scale up production to 12,000 tonnes annually. Also, research into fast-maturing varieties could further enable three production cycles per year, boosting output and farmer incomes.

Beyond milling, KRC supports farmers through advance payments and input financing, enabling access to fertilizers and seeds without dependence on commercial bank loans. Repayments are made after harvest when paddy is delivered to the factory.

Annual production currently stands between 7,000 and 7,500 tonnes of paddy rice. Kirehe Rice supplies to local markets, major urban centers including Kigali, and government-supported school feeding programs across Kirehe,

Ngoma, Kayanza and Bugesera districts.

Demand, however, continues to outpace supply. "Our rice is well accepted by consumers, and stocks often run out within weeks after each season," Niyirora notes.

To bridge this gap, the company is working closely with agronomists and cooperatives to increase yields from an average of six to nine tonnes per hectare. Kirehe Rice is also collaborating with district authorities to

secure an additional 250 hectares for cultivation and promote productive use of underutilized wetlands in line with national policy.

“Our rice is well accepted by consumers, and stocks often run out within weeks after each season”

Looking ahead, Kirehe Rice Company is pursuing diversification projects to enhance sustainability and value addition, including recycling rice husks into modern charcoal and producing animal feed from rice by-products.

"For farmers in this region, rice is more than a crop — it is a reliable livelihood," Niyirora said. "Our growth is anchored in partnership, ensuring farmers benefit first while helping Rwanda meet its growing rice demand."



FROM ONE GOAT TO A LEGACY: THE JOURNEY OF SIKUBWABO SIRIRO

From the 200 francs his mother gave him to Relax Apartments and C-Plaza, a family seed grown into Kirehe's pride.

BY JOHN MUGISHA

In the gentle hills of Rwanda's Eastern Province, where red soil glows beneath the morning sun and banana trees sway in the breeze, a young boy was given 200 francs, he bought a single goat. He didn't know that one small act of hope would one day shape the skyline of his hometown.

"When I bought my first goat with 200 francs," recalls Siriro Sikubwabo, smiling softly, "I didn't know it would culminate into a business venture that would one day lead to buildings in town with my name on it."

Born in 1968 in Mahama Sector of Kirehe District, Siriro grew up in a farming family where every harvest was uncertain and every franc hard-earned. He left school after sixth grade, but his eyes were already fixed on a bigger world.

"At home, our life was farming," he says. "But I used to see kids selling sweets and biscuits at

the market, and I thought — maybe business can change my life."

When his goat gave birth, he sold it and saved enough to rent a three-meter stall at the local trading center. From there, he sold salt, sugar, and small household items — the kind of things people bought every day.

"It wasn't much," he laughs, "but it was mine."

His mother, unsure of his choices, told him to go live on his own. He did, building a tiny grass-thatched house and molding bricks by hand. With every franc

he saved, he bought iron sheets for a stronger roof.

By 1988, Siriro had begun brewing banana beer, a local favorite that became an instant hit. People loved it so much that he realized the power of even small-scale business. The following year, he had built his first iron-roofed house and was ready to start his own family.

Then came 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Like countless Rwandans, Siriro lost everything.

Returning home in 1996, Siriro found himself with

nothing. He began selling cassava flour, lending small sums, and slowly rebuilding his life. When families were resettled in Mahama, he saw opportunity where others saw displacement.

"They built us good homes," he says. "I thought — this is where business can grow."

He began selling salt and soap, reinvesting every profit. By the early 2000s, he moved to Nyamugari, bought a motorcycle to transport goods between markets, and then a car.

"The motorcycle changed everything," he says. "I could reach bigger markets and serve more customers."

Even a failed taxi venture he had invested in 2004 didn't stop him. By 2010, he owned a small shop, and two years later, he bought





a FUSO truck to bring goods from Kigali, a major milestone in his journey.

THE SPARK OF A BUSINESS STUDY TOUR IN MUSANZE

In 2018, a business study tour organized by the district authorities took him to Musanze, where local entrepreneurs had joined forces to build a modern market. That visit changed his perspective.

“I realized success doesn’t only belong to big cities but starts right where you are,” he says.

Siriro sold his truck and

other assets to build a modern commercial building in Nyakarambi, in the heart of Kirehe District.

“People asked, ‘Why not Kigali?’ But this is my home. Why take my success away from the place that raised me?”

RELAX APARTMENTS AND C-PLAZA: A TOWN TRANSFORMED

Today, Siriro’s signature development - Relax Apartments and C-Plaza, is more than a cluster of buildings; it is a statement of progress. With their bright façades and elegant

design, the complexes have reshaped Nyakarambi’s skyline injecting new energy into Kirehe as it steadily grows into a city.

Relax Apartments brings modern hospitality to the



Siriro Sikubwabo.

area, offering spacious accommodation and outing ambiance, while C-Plaza hosts a range of commercial activities, from retail shops to service outlets. Together, they have created jobs for young people, sparked economic activity, and instilled a renewed sense of local pride.

“If I had gone to Kigali, those jobs would have gone there too,” Siriro says. “By staying, I gave local youth a chance to work and grow.”

He credits his journey to hard work — but also to local leaders who believed in him. “Even when I had little, they supported me,” he says. “They helped me access loans because they trusted I would pay back. That trust pushed me forward.”

Asked about his next move, he grins. “I just finished Relax Apartments and C-Plaza buildings, I’m already thinking about the next project. After a little rest — who knows? Maybe there’s another dream waiting.”

From molding bricks by hand to shaping the skyline of Kirehe, Siriro Sikubwabo has shown what’s possible when courage meets vision.

As the sun sets over the storied complex, its windows glowing gold against the eastern hills, Siriro’s journey offers a quiet lesson. Every enduring legacy begins modestly — with a single step, a single brick, one goat, and a dream patiently carried forward.





KIREHE TSS: FORGING FUTURE INNOVATORS IN RWANDA'S EASTERN PROVINCE

On a warm morning in Bugarura, the clang of metal and the hum of sewing machines blend with the chatter of students arriving for their practical sessions. Inside one workshop, a group of learners carefully align timber for a carpentry assignment; in another, fashion students adjust fabric on mannequins as they prepare new designs. Just outside, electrical trainees test connections with quiet focus.

This is Kirehe Technical Secondary School (Kirehe TSS) — a place where ambition becomes action, where rural youth are shaping their futures with their own hands, and where a once-remote district is slowly emerging as a beacon of technical excellence.

A SCHOOL BUILT FOR OPPORTUNITY

Located in Kigina Sector, Kirehe TSS opened its doors in 2010 to meet a pressing need: giving young people in this region access to quality vocational education. Today, with 463 students enrolled from Level 3 to Level 5, it has grown into one of Kirehe District's most important education hubs.

"The school was established as a Vocational Training



Principal Ildephonse Barambanza.

Centre, and it has greatly benefited the community," says Principal Ildephonse Barambanza. "Parents now have a place nearby where their children can gain practical, employable skills."

The school combines academic learning with hands-on practice, ensuring that every learner develops both confidence and competence. Modern

workshops, dedicated teachers, and a culture of innovation have created an environment where students don't just study — they build, design, repair, craft, and create.

PRACTICAL SKILLS TAKE CENTER STAGE

Kirehe TSS offers six major technical programs, all designed to prepare students for the real world:

- Fashion Design
- Building Construction
- Plumbing Technology
- Manufacturing Technology
- Electrical Technology
- Wood Technology

To broaden access, the school also runs short courses in Carpentry, Tailoring, Masonry, Welding, Plumbing, and

Electrical Installation and Maintenance. These programs equip the youth — especially those who need quick, valuable skills that open doors.

By last year, the school had already graduated over 780 students, many of whom now work in the private sector, serve in public institutions, or run their own businesses. Some have even continued to higher learning institutions, carrying with them the technical foundation they built at Kirehe TSS.

LEARNING BY DOING: THE PRODUCTION UNIT

One of the school's biggest strengths is its well-established production unit, where students learn by taking



Even some of the school's own infrastructure — a new classroom block and a manufacturing workshop — was constructed through student and teacher teamwork.



The revenue supports school needs and creates a learning environment deeply tied to community realities. Kirehe TSS has partnered with various local institutions to offer internships and field experience, helping students transition smoothly into the workforce. Other partners sponsor trainees in short courses and even provide starter toolkits, enabling graduates to start micro-enterprises immediately.

For Principal Barambanza, education at Kirehe TSS is more than certification — it is transformation.

"We are fortunate that our country provides a clear direction aligned with global needs," he reflects. "The world today requires us to turn knowledge into solutions. Young people must learn this earlier rather than later."



His message to Rwanda's youth is direct and inspiring: "Join TVET. Learn practical skills. Innovate. The world is changing fast, and hands-on skills are the passport to the future."

This approach has transformed the local labour market. Many graduates no longer wait for job openings — they create their own.

A RISING CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE



SERVES THE COMMUNITY WHILE SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF INNOVATORS

From welding sparks to wood shavings, students at Kirehe TSS are crafting a new narrative for Kirehe District — one built on skill, self-reliance, and opportunity.

Beyond academics, Kirehe TSS is deeply woven into community development. Students participate in charity initiatives such as building homes for vulnerable families and support social programs.

In a community once considered distant and rural, a new generation of makers, designers, builders, and problem-solvers is emerging. And at the heart of this transformation stands Kirehe TSS — a school proving that with the right skills, young people can create not just their own futures, but brighter futures for their community.

The school administration also steps in where it can — supporting households with medical insurance and contributing to local development initiatives.

Parents now have a place nearby where their children can gain practical, employable skills

on real projects for the community. Working alongside instructors, they produce furniture, metal doors and windows, graduation gowns, and other goods.

"This unit gives students real experience and also helps sustain the school," Principal Barambanza explains. "It proves that skills have both economic and social value."

FROM SUBSISTENCE TO SUSTAINABILITY

COADUNA IS TRANSFORMING FISHING AND LIVELIHOODS IN EASTERN RWANDA

BY ROBERT MUGABO;

For generations, communities in Nasho of Kirehe District have relied on fishing from the area's abundant water bodies. Yet for many years, fishing remained largely informal and subsistence-based, offering little opportunity for growth or long-term income.

It was not until the late 1990s that a shift began, as local fishermen started to recognize that fishing, if organized and professionalized, could become a sustainable livelihood.

This realization gave rise to fishing associations, which later united to form Cooperative y'Abarobyi Dusabane Nasho (COADUNA). The cooperative took shape in 2007 and was officially registered two years later.

Today, COADUNA operates



across three major water bodies — Nasho, Chambwe, and Rwampanga — located in Nasho and Mpanga sectors of Kirehe District in Rwanda's Eastern Province.

PROFESSIONALIZING A TRADITIONAL PRACTICE

COADUNA brings together 255 members and is entrusted with managing fishing activities in the area. Beyond harvesting fish, the cooperative



Christian Bizimungu,
President of COADUNA

plays a critical role in safeguarding water bodies by preventing illegal fishing practices. To complement natural fishing, COADUNA also owns fish ponds, helping stabilize supply and productivity.

According to Christian Bizimungu, President of COADUNA, working collectively has been transformative. "The cooperative has





empowered us,” he says. “Fishing is no longer a survival activity; it is a profession that allows members to earn a decent living and employ others.”

From modest beginnings of less than five tonnes of fish per month, COADUNA has grown its production to more than 12 tonnes. This growth has translated into jobs for local youth and strengthened economic activity across the area. The cooperative plans to further expand by establishing additional ponds, acquiring modern fishing equipment, and investing in improved storage facilities.

Interestingly, individuals found engaging in illegal fishing are not simply penalized. Instead, COADUNA works with them through sensitization on sustainable practices and, in many cases, integrates them into the cooperative as members or employees.



CHANGING LIVES AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

COADUNA has invested heavily in building the capacity of its members. Training, savings schemes, and cooperative management have enabled members to meet basic household needs and diversify into other income-generating activities.

“Fishing together as a cooperative has changed my life,” says Jean Bosco Nzungiza, a member of COADUNA. “I started a family, bought land, and built a house.” Jean Bosco notes that while productivity

has improved, access to improved fish fingerlings would further boost output, calling for greater government support.



Epiphanie Mukarubuga, member of COADUNA.

Women’s participation stands out as one of COADUNA’s most notable achievements. Epiphanie Mukarubuga, a cooperative member, describes fishing as the backbone of her family’s livelihood. Traditionally, fishing was male-dominated, but her involvement reflects broader social change.

“To have women in a fishing cooperative shows how far women’s liberation in Rwanda has gone,” Mukarubuga says. She learned to swim, trained in fishing alongside ten other women, and participated in a study tour to Lake Kivu in Gisenyi. Today, she fishes independently and confidently.

Fishing now provides for all her family’s needs. She has educated her children, and improved her home. “My children will never go hungry, lack school fees or health insurance,” she says. Catching between six and eight kilograms of fish daily, she earns



enough income while also ensuring nutritious food for her household.

A GROWING ECONOMIC FORCE

For members, the rewards are tangible. Jean Bosco Nzungize, who recently caught 47 kilograms of fish in a single day, says fishing has become his sole occupation. The income has enabled him to educate his children and plan to purchase a motorcycle to improve transport and efficiency.

COADUNA is able to sell all its production where a significant share is exported to neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo, as the main species caught — locally known as mamba — is less popular in the local market, which favors tilapia. Other species, including sardines, are also harvested.

Through sustained sensitization, local consumption has increased, with at least 5.5 tonnes now sold within surrounding communities.

The cooperative's investments have helped attract buyers and raise fish prices, benefiting fishermen across Kirehe District. As a result, livelihoods have improved markedly. Members are building homes, paying health insurance and Ejo Heza pension contributions while gaining social respect.

"Our biggest challenge is that we still don't meet



Jean Bosco Nzungize, member and advisor of COADUNA.

market demand," says Nzungize, a member and cooperative's advisor. "Everything we produce is sold, which means we must do better."

INFRASTRUCTURE, SOCIAL IMPACT, AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

With support from the district which mobilized partners, they constructed collection and storage facilities at four landing sites for the cooperative. The cooperative also received two fishing engines, improved fingerlings, and training for members.

On its part, COADUNA purchased land and built its own offices, employing 19 staff members. Part of the building is rented out, providing an additional revenue stream.

A local fish shop established by the cooperative also ensures that residents can buy fish at any time. Beyond business, COADUNA's presence has boosted trade and welfare in Nasho and surrounding areas. Malnutrition has declined, supported by increased fish consumption and targeted feeding programs for vulnerable children.

As part of its social responsibility, the cooperative periodically supports community members by paying health insurance, helping repair homes, and assisting the most vulnerable with nutrition.



the cooperative's ability to address the threat. Seasonal flooding from the Akagera River sometimes brings muddy water that disrupts fish habitats and reduces catch levels.

Access to fishing gear is another constraint. Equipment sourced from neighboring countries has become prohibitively expensive due to taxes. Bizimungu calls on institutions such as the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB) and the Ministry of Agriculture to support the cooperative in addressing these challenges. He also urges continued public sensitization on the nutritional benefits of all fish species.

Looking ahead, COADUNA envisions becoming a broader engine of development for Kirehe District — strengthening fishing, improving nutrition, and eventually promoting tourism linked to the area's water bodies. What began as subsistence fishing has evolved into a cooperative model that is reshaping livelihoods, dignity, and opportunity in eastern Rwanda.



PERSISTENT CHALLENGES AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Despite its progress, COADUNA continues to face challenges. Storage facilities remain limited, with only refrigerators and a few coolers available. Fishing is still largely done using traditional methods, constraining productivity. The cooperative aspires

to establish a processing factory, which would require modern fishing, drying, and processing equipment.

Natural risks also persist. Crocodiles and hippopotamuses in the water bodies pose dangers to fishermen, yet these animals fall under the mandate of other institutions, limiting

“Our biggest challenge is that we still don’t meet market demand. Everything we produce is sold, which means we must do better.”





WHERE KIREHE GATHERS: SPORT, YOUTH AND THE MAKING OF A NEW PUBLIC SPACE

BY JEJJE MUHINDE

For many years, Kirehe District in Rwanda's Eastern Province has produced talented volleyball, basketball, and handball players — often competing well beyond the limits of the facilities available to them. The talent was there, but the space and facilities to match that ambition was not.

That gap now has a physical presence. On a quiet stretch of land in Kirehe town stands a new multi-purpose, community-sized gymnasium. The facility completed in November

2025 cost Rwf2.7 billion and was originally scheduled for completion in June but faced delays due to several challenges, including a tragic accident at the site. The gymnasium officially opened on December 6, to support the idea of the Rwandan government to become an African sports hub.

From the outside, the modern infrastructure stands out as one of the most prominent modern structures in Kirehe. It features a simple yet imposing façade, with wide entrances supported by columns and large windows stretching across the upper level.

Located in Nyakarambi, off the Rusumo-Kayonza highway, the facility reflects its role as an open public space designed to host sports, community events, youth activities and other outdoor events. Its clean layout and open frontage make it unique, and notably, the first facility of its kind in the Eastern Province.

Inside, a polished court sits at the center, clearly marked for indoor sports and bordered by wide red and blue safety zones. The playing surface can be adapted for different events using alternative materials. Tiered seating lines both sides of the

hall, finished in Rwanda's national colors, giving the venue a strong sense of identity and pride.





Even from the upper level, spectators enjoy clear sightlines across the court, with seating for more than 1,200 people. Natural light filters through the high windows, while the clean layout and muted colors give the venue a calm, professional feel suited for national-level competitions and modern sporting events.

Thirst for the facility was high, the gymnasium began hosting major activities, including fixtures of the National Volleyball League. These events marked the first major sporting use of the facility ahead of its formal inauguration in December.

On December 5, the gymnasium buzzed with

energy as it filled to capacity with teachers, government officials, parents, journalists, and Kirehe residents celebrating International Teachers' Day. The atmosphere was electric, marked by applause, laughter, and heartfelt tributes to the nation's educators. Organized by the Ministry of

Education in partnership with Kirehe District, the event brought together teachers from across Rwanda, highlighting both their dedication and their critical role in shaping the country's future. Speeches, performances, awards, and traditional dances turned the gymnasium into a stage for recognition, pride, and inspiration.



Beyond celebration, the event called attention to Kirehe District's growing potential as a hub for major national gatherings. The modern facility comfortably accommodated a large crowd, demonstrating the district's capacity to host events of this scale. For many attendees, the day was more than a celebration—it was a reminder of the respect Rwanda places on education and its educators.

Looking ahead, the new gymnasium is expected

to become far more than a sports venue. Designed as a multi-purpose facility, it will host a wide range of activities—from competitive indoor sports to cultural and social events—positioning it as a central hub for community life.

Beyond the main structure, additional facilities have been developed, including a handball court and outdoor basketball and volleyball courts. These spaces expand opportunities for both professional and recreational sports and will provide quality training environment for teams such as Kirehe Volleyball Club.

Modeste Nzirabatinya, Vice Mayor in charge of Economic Development said the gymnasium will play a key role in nurturing local talent, particularly among young people aiming for national and international recognition.

“The multi-purpose facility is now fully operational, and the plan is to hand it over to private sector management,” the Vice Mayor said. “We are encouraging people around the facility to grow



“We are encouraging people around the facility to grow their businesses, so visitors can easily find services such as hotels, restaurants and places to stay.”

their businesses, so visitors can easily find services such as hotels, restaurants and places to stay.”

The Vice Mayor also revealed that plans are underway to

revive Kirehe volleyball team through talent development, with the aim of returning to the national league.

The facility will help harness Kirehe’s large youth population by offering constructive opportunities that promote discipline, social cohesion, physical fitness, and excellence in sport, while steering youth away from harmful or illegal activities.

Beyond sports, the gymnasium and the adjacent youth center are also expected to support creative and cultural communities. Young artists, performers,

and event organizers will have a platform to showcase their work, creating new income opportunities while promoting local creativity.

As Kirehe continues to grow a city, the new modern gymnasium stands as part of a broader vision, one that combines economic development, youth empowerment, and modern infrastructure into a place where residents can live, work, and play.

Kirehe Gymnasium joins other international standard facilities in Rwanda including EBK Gymnasium in Kigali, BK ARENA and Petit Stade.



KIREHE SUN CITY HOTEL



Celestin Habanabakize, Founder of
KIREHE SUN CITY HOTEL

Kirehe Sun City is a fast-growing hospitality facility in Nyakarambi, Kirehe District. Founded in 2008 by Celestin Habanabakize, the establishment began as a small bar and has steadily evolved into a well-known motel, with ambitious plans to develop into a four-star hotel.

A respected and active businessman in Kirehe, Habanabakize plays a significant role in the district's development, having contributed to both the local economy and community life. He previously served as President of Kirehe Football

Club during its peak years, underscoring his commitment to sports and social development.

Kirehe Sun City offers single and double rooms with breakfast, a restaurant serving local dishes, BBQ and full bar services, as well as spacious halls and gardens for weddings and events. Guests also benefit from secure parking and transport services, making the motel a preferred destination for comfort, convenience and quality service.



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