

Jacqueline Kayitare, the Mayor of Muhanga District is a law graduate with a Masters in Business Administration. The 43-year old married mother of three was born in Byimana (Ruhango District) and attended her secondary in Muhanga, a place she knows better and calls home. Rwanda Dispatch's Steven Nsamaza talked to the Mayor about her experiences and the district's development outlook.



Mayor Jacqueline Kayitare during the interview at her office.

You are about to mark your first anniversary as the mayor of Muhanga, what has been your personal experiences in this position?

Mayor Jacqueline Kayitare: This has been a life changing experience for me, personally I like to give and where others benefit from my actions makes me feel very happy. Becoming the mayor was a very different experience from other civil service positions I held.

Previously the people I served took it as a normal service but not the citizens I am serving now. When we support vulnerable families, be it building them a house, give health insurance or take their children to school it means everything to them because that changes people's lives and I love this.

Accelerating development is part of IMIHIGO, how are you doing this?

IMIHIGO (Performance Contracts) are target goals, it's the best way to focus on envisioned development, we agree on IMIHIGO after discussions on what is needed, which solutions they are offering, when should they be implemented and decide on priorities.

When setting IMIHIGO at the district we align them with national level to tap into activities to undertake and then consider the district development plans and the unique features of the district as well as our beneficiaries, who have to be involved. This is done in consideration of the priorities from the lowest grassroots administrative level of Isibo and the village to address the prevailing needs. What is important is to ensure that all concerned parties have a role to play in planning and implementation of IMIHIGO.

Successful implementation of IMIHIGO has helped pull citizens out of poverty, what is Muhanga's experience?

Poverty reduction is a journey and you can't achieve it overnight, but we have embarked on this journey to fight poverty in a sustainable way. Since we started using IMIHIGO as a tool for poverty reduction there are some things that have become targets for people to follow in advocating and implementing IMIHIGO. There are many solutions that we have obtained which may not be 100% and that's why we keep setting new performance contracts every year and we will continue on that course.

How do you work with Development Partners?

We have different partners in development, there is the private sector involved in various economic activities with a very important role to play, local and international NGO's that are very instrumental in the lives of our people. Faith based organisations who we work with in education and health sectors, for example Kabgayi Diocese, Shyogwe Diocese and other several religious organisation are contributing to development. When we evaluate these partners we have found that they are leading a sustainable transformative journey of our community.

What are the main economic activities in Muhanga District and how is it spurring development?

The private sector as I have said is an important partner in Muhanga, its driving our economy involved in agriculture, mining and trade as the main economic activities. When we take an example of the mining sector its very instrumental to our economy, it employs a big number of the population and has tangible contributions through taxes.

How are you attracting investments to Muhanga?

We have had no problem attracting investments because of the straight forward potentialities that Muhanga possesses. For example mining has been self-attracting where investors keep coming and it fetches good returns.

Trade is another part that has grown the district and Muhanga town in particular, the central location of the town has been strategic in attracting local investments and serves the southern and a big part of the western regions of the country.

What are the tourism potentials of your district?

Tourism is still underdeveloped in the district but something we have been thinking

and discussing with different stakeholders. Muhanga is located in central Rwanda, so whatever we develop will most likely succeed. First we are looking at developing infrastructures like hotels to be able to host guests, in partnership with our neighbours Kamonyi and Ruhango districts we are in the process of building a 5-star hotel.

In collaboration with Rwanda Development Board (RDB) we are mapping all potential touristic attractions. For example we are in the process of developing Rusaga natural forest which is already certified, we are to develop historical places like the former King's palace better known as 'Kwakankazi', there is also Kabgayi Basilica, among very few in Africa. The district is also undertaking the final design of the master plan that will fully detail and designate the residential, commercial, educational and amusement places.

Muhanga town has been designated among secondary cities, what are you doing as the district to make this a reality?

When our town was picked to become one of the six secondary cities after Kigali we were overjoyed with the decision. As the district and residents we have set targets to show that we deserve it. Our town only had one road passing through but now we are undertaking infrastructure development, building roads around town, rolling out electricity connectivity, and building a 78km water supply in parts of the town with no water and neighbouring sectors.

The city master plan is at 96% completion phase and we are working with Rwanda Housing Authority to improve the housing plan of the city. We are aiming to transform Muhanga into a city that provides solutions for residents as well as guests.

What message do have for people in Muhanga?

One message to the residents of Muhanga as always is, let's work hard because it's the only way to achieve what we aim for. Let me echo our slogan, 'IMBANGUKIRAMIHIGO' with an embedded message, for working more, in a better way and in a short period.

Thank you.