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.

Madam Consolata Kayitesi, an entreprenuer and owner of Comfort Villa in Kirehe

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.