

One Woman is Redefining Success in Rwanda's New Era

In the heart of Kigali, where the city's rhythm pulses with the promise of a rising nation, Lebanon Hotel quietly opens its doors to travelers from near and far. But beyond its clean rooms and warm hospitality lies a deeper narrative—one of resilience, ambition, and transformation.

At the center of it all is Claudine Rukundo, a Rwandan entrepreneur whose journey reflects the powerful role women have played in rebuilding Rwanda over the last 31 years.

As co-founder of the family-run Lebanon Hotel, Rukundo greets guests with the kind of warmth that makes the hotel feel less like a business and more like home. But behind her gracious demeanor is a powerful testimony of what it means to be a Rwandan woman in a country that has redefined itself from the ashes of tragedy.



A Dream Anchored in National Vision

Rukundo and her family didn't start Lebanon Hotel merely to make a living—they built it to be part of a national dream.

"We believed in the country's direction— especially in President Paul Kagame's leadership. His commitment to women's emancipation made it possible for people like me to dream, and to create something meaningful," she says.

Her story echoes Rwanda's broader transformation—a nation that has, in just three decades since the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, emerged as a model of recovery, reconciliation, progress, and importantly gender equality.

Starting a hospitality business is never easy. Doing so in the aftermath of a national tragedy like genocide and war made the challenge even greater, but Lebanon Hotel was born and has weathered the challenges.

As business started to flourish another crisis struck and this time it was global, paralyzing everything especially the hospitality sector.

"When COVID-19 struck, we had to close the doors," Rukundo recalls. "No guests, no income. everything stopped."

But Rukundo is not one to back down. Alongside her family and dedicated team, she weathered the crisis—managing loan repayments, keeping her staff motivated, and adapting to new realities.

“The government didn’t abandon us,” she says. “They reduced interest rates on our bank loans. That helped us survive.”

Today, Lebanon Hotel is thriving once again. With its reputation for friendly service, spotless rooms, and generous breakfasts, it has become a favorite among both local and international guests—especially those arriving through the nearby airport in Kigali.



A New Rwanda for Women

For Rukundo, the Rwanda she lives in today stands in stark contrast to the one she grew up in.

“Before the genocide, girls in Rwanda rarely had the same opportunities as boys. Women were expected to stay home, to remain silent,” she says.

That reality has changed. Women now lead in parliament, run businesses, head institutions, and raise daughters who grow up knowing no limits.

“This government has placed women at the forefront. We can now access loans, get an education, and build our own businesses just like men,” she says. “I employ both men and women here. Watching them support their families through this work is one of the most fulfilling parts of what I do.”

Building More Than a Business

Looking ahead, Rukundo envisions growth—not just of her business, but of opportunity.

“In the next five to ten years, I see Lebanon Hotel expanding. We want to open more hotels—to create jobs and bring services closer to local communities.”

For her, hospitality is more than comfort—it's empowerment. Every room, every paycheck, every smile exchanged with a guest is a building block in Rwanda's story of hope and progress.

For Rukundo, the youth and especially women should seize these opportunities the country offers. She advises them to be confident and work hard. "Don't be afraid to work hard. Be bold in business. Use your skills and your knowledge. This is our time. Under this leadership, anything is possible."

"Thank you, President Paul Kagame, for putting women at the center of development. Your leadership has changed our lives."

From one woman's vision in Kigali to a nation reimagined, the story of Claudine Rukundo is more than personal success. It is a reflection of Rwanda's transformation—and a promise of what lies ahead.