Rwandan driver Queen Kalimpinya and her co-driver Olivier Ngabo have safely navigated the punishing opening stages of the Pearl of Africa Uganda Rally, which burst into life on Thursday, May 8, in Mbarara District.

The Queen Rally Team crew, the only Rwandan entry in this year's event, is making its first competitive appearance on Ugandan gravel aboard a Subaru Impreza GVB.

Their campaign began with the crucial shakedown stage at Mwesigwa Resort, where crews fine-tune their cars before the real fight begins. Kapalinya clocked 5:01.4 across the 4.66km and 3.77km test sections, enough to secure classification among the African Rally Championship contenders.

For the Rwandan crew, getting through the opening loop cleanly was always going to be the priority. The team arrived in Uganda chasing valuable ARC2 championship points after losing out earlier this season because of fuel tank problems.

So far, Kalimpinya has managed to keep the car on the road through the rough and highly demanding Mbarara stages, surviving one of the toughest opening tests on the regional calendar.

Speaking to Ugandan outlet Kawowo Sports, Kapalinya said her main target is simply to finish the rally while adapting to the newer Subaru Impreza WRX STI GVB package.

"This car is more powerful and technically different from the GC8 I usually drive in Rwanda," she explained.

Over recent seasons, Kalimpinya has steadily built a reputation as one of Rwanda's leading female rally drivers, with noticeable improvement in both pace and consistency.

Her presence alone is significant in a rally that has already seen several registered crews fail to make the start despite completing entry requirements. Among the notable absentees were experienced Rwandan drivers Claude Gakwaya, Christine Kanagire, and Eric Gakwaya.

For Kalimpinya, competing in one of the region's most demanding rallies is another important step as she continues gaining experience beyond Rwanda's borders.

This year's Pearl of Africa Rally features 188.39km of competitive stages, 378.83km

of liaison sections, and a total route distance of 567.22km.. It is the **second** round of the 2026 FIA African Rally Championship (ARC). The season opened with the Safari Rally Kenya in March, before crews headed to Uganda for Round 2.

The Rwanda Mountain Gorilla Rally will be the third round of the 2026 ARC calendar and is scheduled for July 10–12, 2026, in Kigali.

Here’s the current ARC order for 2026:

1. Safari Rally Kenya — March 12–15
2. Pearl of Africa Uganda Rally — May 7–10
3. Rwanda Mountain Gorilla Rally — July 10–12
4. Mkwawa Rally of Tanzania — October 2–4