

Rwanda's 2026 local government elections began on Saturday, October 24, with more than 90% of candidates for district council seats having submitted their applications electronically, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) said.

NEC Chairperson Oda Gasinzigwa disclosed the figure during a press briefing on Friday, October 23, in response to a question from Rwanda Dispatch about the use of technology in the electoral process.



NEC Chairperson Oda Gasinzigwa

She said the commission had also tested electronic applications for election observers and found considerable interest in the system.

"This is a positive development, and we believe it is a way forward as we continue improving other processes," Gasinzigwa said.

She added that NEC could learn from other sectors that have made progress in providing digital services.

More than 1,000 people applied to contest seats on district councils across Rwanda's 30 districts. The nomination period ran from October 10 to October 21. NEC is scheduled to publish a provisional list of eligible candidates on October 26, followed by the final list on October 30.

Approved candidates will campaign from November 7 to November 21 ahead of the district council elections.

Voting begins at village level

The elections began at the village level, where residents are choosing members of village executive committees and representatives to other local governance structures. The electoral process will continue through cell, sector, district and national council structures.

Each village executive committee comprises a village head and members responsible for security, population movements, social welfare and community cohesion, information and public awareness, and development.

Voters will also elect representatives to Cell Councils, two women to represent their peers at the cell level in the National Women's Council, and members of the village executive committees of the National Women's Council and National Youth Council.

Each of Rwanda's 30 districts will have a 17-member council comprising five women representatives, eight general councillors and four representatives of special interest groups: women, youth, persons with disabilities and the private sector.

District mayors and their deputies will be elected from among the elected district councillors.

NEC calls for greater public participation

Gasinzigwa also urged citizens, particularly young people, to take part in elections, describing participation in public affairs as a constitutional right.

She said the commission had observed encouraging participation in previous elections, including among women and young people, although she did not provide comparative figures for the current electoral cycle.

"Young people should understand that participating in elections is part of exercising their rights and that their involvement can help bring about meaningful change," she said.

Gasinzigwa cited the use of TikTok and other digital platforms by young people to mobilise and encourage electoral participation, describing it as a positive sign of youth engagement.

She said NEC would continue voter education to help citizens understand their rights and the importance of participating in public affairs.

The commission also acknowledged that challenges remain in the electoral process.

"Although we continue to make progress, we do not claim to be 100% perfect," Gasinzigwa said, adding that feedback from journalists and other stakeholders could help NEC identify gaps and improve future elections.

More than 90 observers registered

More than 90 election observers had registered to monitor the electoral process, according to NEC. Applications for observer accreditation opened on October 1 and closed on October 22.

Domestic observers include representatives of government institutions, the National Commission for Human Rights, political organisations, nongovernmental organisations and legally recognised faith-based organisations.

International observers may include representatives of international organisations, electoral management bodies from other countries, and diplomatic missions accredited to Rwanda.

Gasinzigwa said observers' reports help the commission assess the conduct of elections, safeguard citizens' rights and identify areas for improvement.

She urged accredited observers to remain impartial, follow the rules governing their work and base their reports on verifiable facts rather than personal opinions or unverified information.

The electoral process is scheduled to continue through November 30, with the full composition of the National Women's Council, National Youth Council and National Council of Persons with Disabilities expected to be completed by December 15.