Rwanda’s Ombudsman has raised concerns over the persistent rise in land-related disputes, which continue to dominate citizen complaints filed to her office, warning that poor coordination and delayed local responses are eroding public trust in government institutions.

Presenting the 2024/25 annual report to Parliament on Tuesday, Ombudsman Madeleine Nirere said her office received 2,305 citizen complaints during the year including 1,306 raised during community outreach visits and 999 submitted in writing. Of these, land disputes accounted for 393 cases, more than any other category.

“Most of these conflicts stem from inheritance, land sharing after divorce, or unrecorded sales,” Nirere told lawmakers. “They are often rooted in family misunderstandings, but also in limited awareness of legal procedures.”

The report shows that of the written complaints received, 501 cases were resolved, while 337 remain under follow-up in various institutions and 161 are still being handled by the Ombudsman’s Office. Through the anti-corruption outreach program, 1,020 cases were successfully resolved, and 267 others are being pursued in coordination with relevant agencies.

Districts most affected by citizen grievances include Gicumbi, which accounted for 26 percent of all cases, followed by Rutsiro (21%), Nyanza and Kayonza (20% each), and Nyaruguru (13%).

Lawmakers expressed concern over long-standing disputes that appear to stall at the local level until the Ombudsman intervenes. Senator Dr. Usta Kaitesi cited the case of KOGIAGI Cooperative in Gicumbi District, which owed dairy farmers Rwf 50 million for milk supplies. After the Ombudsman’s mediation, Rwf 42 million has been repaid, leaving Rwf 8 million outstanding.

Another case highlighted in the report involved 624 residents of Busasamana and Rwabicuma sectors in Kayonza District, who had not been compensated for property lost during the construction of the Bishya Dam by WASAC in 2020. The Ombudsman said 425 people have since been paid after meeting compensation requirements, while 152 are awaiting payment through the Ministry of Finance and 65 are being assisted to complete the process.

Nirere said such cases reveal weaknesses in local governance and accountability.

“Citizen complaint resolution should not be seen as an afterthought,” she said. “It must be part of every district’s performance contracts. When issues are ignored, they undermine confidence in public institutions and create space for corruption.”

She recommended that all districts establish dedicated sessions for resolving citizen complaints and track each case to closure.

“Ensuring justice and responsiveness at the local level is key to fighting corruption and strengthening public trust,” Nirere added.