

From Food Basket to Logistics Hub, Kirehe Is Shaping Its Future

*As Rwanda accelerates its journey toward Vision 2050, cities are playing an increasingly central role in driving inclusive growth. Located at a strategic crossroads bordering Tanzania and Burundi, also having a designated secondary city, Kirehe is emerging as both an agricultural powerhouse and a gateway for regional trade. In this interview with **Bruno Rangira, Mayor of Kirehe District**, he tells **Rwanda Dispatch** about development priorities in his district, from irrigation and infrastructure to water access, youth empowerment, and accountable governance. He also explains how local leadership is translating national ambitions into tangible progress for communities.*

Thank you, Mayor, for speaking with **Rwanda Dispatch Magazine [RD]**.

RD: As Kirehe positions itself strategically, what key governance and leadership priorities are shaping the district's development?

Mayor Bruno Rangira [Mayor]: Our work as a district is guided by Rwanda's broader national vision, particularly Vision 2050 and the National Strategy for Transformation (NST2). These frameworks provide a clear pathway toward achieving the country's development goals.

For Kirehe, which is predominantly agricultural, one of our top priorities is to position as a leading agricultural hub. We have made significant investments in irrigation schemes, and today we host some of the country's major food basket areas that support national food security. Working closely with government institutions and local stakeholders, we are focused on increasing productivity through mechanization, expanded irrigation, and modern farming practices to ensure sustainable food production.

Given our strategic location bordering Tanzania and Burundi, we are also positioning Kirehe as a logistics hub. Tanzania serves as Rwanda's main gateway to the port of Dar es Salaam, and many goods pass through our district. This creates an opportunity to integrate into national and regional supply chains.

Tourism is another area of potential. Kirehe has natural attractions and rich landscapes, and we are working to enhance tourism experiences while strengthening the service sector linked to tourism. As a designated secondary city, we are also prioritizing infrastructure development and planned urbanization to

support economic growth and improve quality of life.



RD: Farmers in Eastern Province often raise concerns about access to fertilizers and agricultural inputs. How does Kirehe ensure transparency and fair distribution?

Mayor: We have strong systems in place to manage fertilizer and input distribution transparently. On the supply side, we use the Rwanda Online Platform for Agricultural Inputs (ROPA), while on the demand side we use SMARK, a digital system for smart subsidies and vouchers. These platforms track inputs from suppliers all the way to farmers.

We mobilize farmers to register on time so they can access inputs efficiently. This also helps agro-dealers understand demand and plan their supply accordingly.

RD: Kirehe is expanding piped water access, how far with this initiative?

Mayor: We currently have 34 public water systems, but coverage is still low. In the short and medium term, we are working to improve and expand these systems so they can reliably supply water.

In the long term, we are working with the Ministry of Infrastructure and WASAC to establish a water treatment plant in Kirehe. Studies have been completed, and we are now mobilizing resources for construction. This will be a lasting solution to meet growing water demand.

RD: What are the latest infrastructure developments in the district?

Mayor: Electrification is one of our biggest projects. We have reached between 78 and 79 percent electricity coverage, and with ongoing projects including solar solutions, we expect to reach close to 100 percent access in the near future.

We are also developing physical plans for settlements in urban and peri-urban areas to support orderly urbanization as a secondary city. In terms of roads, we have completed one kilometer in Nyakarambi, finalized studies for more than 10 kilometers of urban roads, and are mobilizing funding for construction.

Additionally, we are constructing approximately 18 kilometers of road linking the

Rusumo–Kayonza highway to Mahama refugee camp, supporting both MINEMA and access to Akagera National Park. In health and education, we have expanded Kirehe Hospital with a modern operating theatre, completed two TVET schools, and are constructing a new health center in Nyarubuye.



RD: With a population of about 460,000 and limited land, is that a governance challenge ?

Mayor: I do not see population growth as a challenge if it is productive. In fact, it can become a demographic dividend. One of the main challenges we face is climate-related drought, which can affect productivity, but we are addressing this through irrigation and resilient agricultural practices.

RD: How is the district supporting vulnerable households in the fight against poverty and malnutrition?

Mayor: First of all, we are implementing the national poverty reduction strategy, which focuses on targeted support for households below the poverty line through social protection and employment opportunities. The results are encouraging. According to the 7th Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV7), poverty in Kirehe has declined from 26.5 to 14 percent.

This progress is driven by targeted interventions such as improved agriculture, access to inputs, livestock distribution, and income-generating activities. We have also expanded health services, with over 46 health posts, 19 health centers, and one hospital. Our aim is to have a health post in every cell. We are improving efficiency through partnerships and increasing the number of trained community health workers to enhance service delivery.



RD: What are you doing to empower youth, particularly in skills development?

Mayor: Kirehe has a large youth population, and we are actively engaging them through youth forums, volunteer programs in agriculture, and cooperative formation. We encourage young people to enroll in short technical and vocational courses, particularly through our TVET institutions, to equip them with practical

skills for employment and entrepreneurship.

RD: How does the district promote investment and private sector engagement?

Mayor: We work closely with the private sector through urban development projects such as the Nyakarambi Modern Market, which has attracted over 200 private investors. This project will transform our town from small shops to organized market spaces, accommodation facilities, and shopping centers.

We are also developing plans for an industrial zone. There is strong demand from industries seeking space for factories and warehouses, and we are collaborating with the Ministry of Trade and Industry and other stakeholders to facilitate land access for investors.

RD: Accountability and transparency are often key concerns. How does Kirehe address them?

Mayor: Accountability and transparency are central to our governance approach. We have clear evaluation mechanisms, enforce policies at all administrative levels, and hold accountable leaders who do not deliver.

We maintain regular communication with citizens, cooperatives, the private sector, and the district council. Every semester, we meet with councils at cell, sector, and village levels, and each year organize a council week to review progress and respond to citizen concerns. Weekly village meetings and community outreach activities allow us to stay closely connected to residents.

We have also disseminated a service charter outlining service standards and timelines. Citizen complaints are handled by governance officers at sector level and an ad hoc district team that ensures timely and comprehensive responses.

RD: Finally, as Kirehe enters a new phase of growth, what message would you like to share about the district's future?

Mayor: This is an exciting time for Kirehe. Being designated a secondary city has opened up significant opportunities, and we are already seeing major investments in agriculture, infrastructure, water, and electricity.

I call upon our residents, the private sector, civil society, and all stakeholders to

work together so we can fully harness these opportunities and continue moving Kirehe forward in a sustainable and inclusive way.

RD: Thank you, Mayor.

