Mugabo Marie Laetitia Agatesi from an executive in media to philanthropist focusing on livelihoods transformation of vulnerable women, mostly homeless in Nyarugenge, City of Kigali. Her local organization is focusing on the plight of homeless and teen mothers.

Agatesi responded to the plight of homeless women mostly seeking technical and policy support. As her zeal and passion grew, her determination and conviction to swing into action grew stronger.

Then, Agatesi partnered with Bishop Jolly Murenzi to establish the Rescue Girls and Women Transformation Center (REGIWO), a social enterprise that partners with Nyarugenge District to help homeless women. The centre empowers women through vocational training skills to start their own income generating projects such as tailoring.

THE BOOMING CAMPUS

In a quiet room, situated just behind a modest center in Nyarugenge, Kigali City, sewing machines buzz steadily as women and teen mothers are seemingly busy with their routine. Each stitch they make represents a step away from the streets, and toward self-reliance.

This is the heart of the REGIWO—an initiative led by Mugabo Marie Letitia Agatesi, a media executive and women's advocate who has dedicated her life to giving vulnerable women in Rwanda the tools to stand on their own.

Agatesi is the Coordinator of the National Women Council in Nyarugenge District and also the Commissioner of Women and Gender Pan-African Movement. She sees her roles as complementary— both centered on creating opportunities for women to lead, work, and contribute to society.

Agatesi's drive to support women started long before the center opened its doors. After years working at Isango Star Radio and Television, she co-founded with her husband, Justin Mugabo. Her work in media was not just about broadcasting—it was about using the platform to inform and uplift society.

But it was a moment in 2019 while visiting California that sharpened her focus. She saw homeless women sleeping on sidewalks— some with children. The scene

stayed with her, “I thought homelessness was rare. But if this is what’s happening here, what would it look like in Rwanda?”

Back in Kigali, she came across homeless women, one morning she encountered naked women washing clothes near a stream in one of the city valleys. These women had no homes and no extra clothes to put on when they were washing, she convinced them to come with her and started helping them.

Agatesi partnered with Bishop Jolly Murenzi to respond to the needs of women experiencing homelessness, particularly teen mothers. With no initial funding, they began offering basic support and counseling.

What started as a small act of solidarity grew into a formal training space for women left behind by traditional support systems.

With support from stakeholders like the City of Kigali and Bishop Murenzi’s Church, the center began
offering practical training in sewing, knitting, shoemaking, and tailoring. More than 500 women have since completed the program. Those who graduate receive a sewing machine, startup support, and guidance on how to market their products.

“We don’t just teach them skills,” Agatesi says. “We help them understand that they are capable of building a life, no matter what they’ve been through.”

The program is built around structure. Newcomers receive counseling, then start with theory and basic training, they move into workshop practice, and finally life skills support before joining savings groups. Follow-ups are conducted to ensure the women stay on track. The center also accommodates boys and young men from vulnerable backgrounds.

Telephina Mukasenti, a teen mother from Nyamirambo, says the center helped her move from uncertainty to independence. “Before, I was struggling just to survive, Now, I know how to sew. I sell clothes and support my child.”

Assumpta Byukusenge, a trainer at the centre, says they train about 25 to 30 women every six months. “Many come with no experience at all, and within months they can make practical things they can sell like school uniforms, handbags and tablecloths—,” she explains.

Still, the initiative faces challenges. According to Bishop Murenzi, limited space and lack of materials make it hard to expand. “We have many more women who need help,” he says. “But without enough resources, we have to turn some away.”

Despite the hurdles, REGIWO continues to serve as a lifeline. Agatesi’s work has also expanded to organizing international workshops. In May, she’s leading the International Women Congress in Kigali, where she’ll host over hundreds of women from across the continent.

The road to empower women, led Agatesi to authore a book titled Urugendo rwo Kwigirira Ikizere (The Journey to Self-Confidence), sharing insights and experiences aimed at inspiring women to believe in themselves and embrace their full potential.

As the Deputy Managing Director of Isango Star, Agatesi balances her media role with community efforts. She has helped start talk shows— such as Umutima w’Urugo, Iterambere ry’umugore, turerere Urwanda and Isango Mama among others—focus on family values, women’s rights, and civic responsibility; all aligned with national development goals.