In 2018, Rubavu City was designated as one of Rwanda's six secondary cities to become poles of economic growth and development. The cities are to create opportunities for citizens outside of Kigali and ensure more balanced regional growth and opportunities for increased access to off farm employment for a larger proportion of the population. The Government of Rwanda (GoR) has adopted a deliberate approach towards urbanization. Under the 'Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy' ("EDPRS"), the government set out plans to mitigate growing unplanned urbanization particularly in Kigali City by focusing on creating economic centres of opportunity across the country.

As a result of the approach, Rubavu has become the 'International Gateway City and Tourism Hub'.

Located on the northern edge of Lake Kivu and borders Goma City, in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rubavu is Rwanda's major tourism destination. The district, also, has the second fastest population growth rate and the highest population density of the six secondary cities, according to the Global Green Growth Institute.

It is the only district, in which Agriculture employs less than 50% of the workforce. Economic activity is gradually deconcentrating away from Kigali towards Rubavu. It is important to note that the Rubavu-Musanze corridor generates the same level of employment as all the other secondary cities combined.

Rubavu boasts of a significant number of large firms; key tourism assets; abundant fertile Agricultural hinterlands; and a crucial cross-border area with a market of over a million inhabitants in Goma.

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the region has seen strategic investments and economic projects to increase its attractiveness.

As of 2023, 53 percent of the surface area of Rubavu District is urban. It is only next to Kigali City. Rubavu has a population of 546,000.

Not long ago, this area was called 'Gisenyi'. Because of the fast rate of urbanisation, the city's geographical spread includes the sectors of Rubavu, Rugerero, Nyamyumba, Gisenyi, Kanama and Nyakiliba – meaning over half of the district is now urban.

The District is currently at the fourth stage of transformation process of all targets that were set to be attained by 2024, according to the Acting Mayor Deogratias Nzabonimpa.

Acting Mayor Deogratias Nzabonimpa

Apart from noticeable infrastructural developments, the social well-being of residents has risen significantly. Stunting in children reduced by 20% a few years ago, to currently 20%, which is below national average.

The Mayor proudly notes: “I can confidently say that President Kagame’s urbanization vision to transform Rubavu, is being achieved at a faster rate than envisaged. People in neighbouring districts are moving to Rubavu thereby creating more land for Agriculture, which will ultimately increase food production for the local demand and exports.”

Crops such as beans, maize, Irish potatoes, coffee, tea and pyrethrum thrive on Rubavu soils mostly volcanic soils.

In partnership with the Belgian development agency – ENABEL, construction activities are in advanced stages for interconnecting roads and drainage system of the city.

Rubavu has an uninterrupted supply of clean water as a result of the project of Rehabilitation, Upgrading and Extension of Water Supply Networks in Gisenyi and it’s Peri-Urban Areas that include parts of Nyabihu District.

Implemented between 2019-2022, the project constructed 139 Km pipelines, one reservoir of 1,000 m3 capacity, construction of 7 small reservoirs of 230 m3 capacity each, rehabilitation of 11 small reservoirs of 225 m3, 3 pumping stations, construction of 17 public taps, and 6 new water Kiosks, the rehabilitation of 14 public taps and three (3) water kiosks and the protection of four (4) water sources.

The rehabilitation of the network increased the supply capacity of Gihira water treatment plant from 8,000 m3 up to 23,000 m3. Slightly above 50 percent of the water is used today, with the rest being in reserve to cater for the continued

expansion of the city.

Methane gas production project, which is in final stages of completion will add 56MW into the national grid. The Mayor said of the project: “We are contributing a great deal towards the growing national resilience. The methane project has created jobs, helped catalyze expansion of roads and other infrastructures. This electricity won’t only just be used locally, but also benefit our neighbours.”

Electricity supply in Rubavu is 24/7 and the city is wholly lit up at night and its lights shine brightly along all roads, the lakeside and neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, the inauguration of the two-hectare Rubavu port is slated to take place in December 2023. The facility is located in Nyamyumba Sector along Lake Kivu shores. It is anticipated that the port will enhance tourism and facilitate cross-border trade between DRC and Rwanda.

The new Rwf8 billion Rubavu Bus Terminal with a capacity of accommodating 120 Coasters or 80 buses was opened last December. Once fully completed early next year, it will be the largest bus park in the country, dotted with a large magnificent shopping complex, warehouse for cross border trade, and other hospitality facilities.

“By comparison, our bus park has few competitors even from Kigali in terms of structural design, capacity and general outlook,” said the Mayor.

Rubavu has another unique characteristic. Nearly all Rwanda’s border regions, all the others are entry points for mostly imports. Rubavu, however, is the first border district to position itself as an export region and route, which translates into increased revenue into the district and country at large.

The Mayor notes: “Rubavu is a gateway for cross border trade and foreigners are taking advantage of the economic opportunities it offers. But, our goal is to have more Rwandans enjoying what the gateway has to offer.”

Lake Kivu offers countless opportunities for would-be investors. Water transport remains a “virgin sector” waiting to be tapped to enjoy the vast market in the North

and South Kivu Provinces.

To both local and foreign tourists, Rubavu is the only place along Lake Kivu bank and in Rwanda with lakeside beaches that meet the qualities of a beach. It hosted the 2019 FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour. It has become home for IRONMAN 70.3 Rwanda, and the 2024 edition is due August 4.



“Any businessperson looking for opportunities, Rubavu is your place for assured returns,” says the Mayor. “Rubavu district is moving closer to a destination highlight on the global travel calendar.”

You can visit Ibere rya Bigogwe, the greenest hills in Rwanda during a guided tour, spend a day with the cows while there. Join the cattle keepers during milking and drinking time and you’ll not miss the traditional games and songs.

“That experience of international guests milking cows is not something we have had before. It is a new exciting phenomenon. Everyone who visits Ibere rya Bigogwe leaves with a lasting impression,” says the Mayor.

