Rusizi secondary city is undergoing a facelift that has seen several shanty houses beautified by willing residents in order to catch up with the city's master plan. District authorities launched the planting of ornament trees such as palm trees on several streets. In the Imihigo District rankings, Rusizi significantly inproved from the 30th to the 6th position in 2021/2022. Dr. Anicet Kibiriga, the Mayor talked to Rwanda Dispatch's George Kalisa and Steven Nsamaza about developments in his district.

Dr. Kibiriga, an academician-cum-Politician who served as a Research Specialist, Senior Advisor to DG REB and Economics Lecturer was elected to Mayorship in November 2021.

Qn: Mayor, what has been your primary interventions?

Mayor: Since my election as Mayor of Rusizi District in November 2021, I have presided over many development initiatives and reforms including popularizing the slogan of the district known locally as 'Tujyanemo'. Rusizi city was Kamembe Sector extended to Gihundwe, Mururu and some cells of Nkombo, Nkanka, Giheke and Nyakarenzo.

Qn: Can you please give us some facts about Rusizi?

Mayor: Thank you so much, Rusizi District with a population of 485,529 inhabitants sits on 940.95 square kilometres. It borders Burundi to the South and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the west. The district constitutes of 18 sectors which are; Butare, Bweyeye, Gikundamvura, Gashonga, Giheke, Gihundwe, Gitambi, Kamembe, Muganza, Mururu, Nkanka, Nkombo, Nkungu, Nyakabuye, Nyakarenzo, Nzahaha, Rwimbogo and Bugarama. It largely depends on trade, crop husbandry and livestock.

Qn: What makes Rusizi unique from other districts?

Mayor: Rusizi borders two neighbouring countries with Rwanda – Burundi and DRC. Its location makes it benefit from cross-border trade with these countries. Secondly, Rusizi soils are favourable for food production particularly the sectors of Nzahaha, Bugarama, Gikundamvura, and Nyakabuye. You have heard of the Bugarama rice, grown in the vast plains and Rusizi is Rwanda's model district as regards the growing of fruits. We grow patchouli oil plants that are used as raw materials in the processing of perfumes.

Rusizi was the first district in the country to establish a coffee wasting station to produce high quality coffee dubbed Rusizi Speciality Coffee.

Also, King Musinga shortly stayed in Kamembe after he had been deposed on November 12, 1931 by the Beligian colonial administration hence the area's great historic significance.

In addition, the district is endowed with other natural wonders like the hot springs in Bugarama that are part of the tourist attractions of the district.

Qn: You have talked of cross-border trade, what are the efforts in place to promote it, especially after the slowdown caused by Covid-19 restrictions?

Mayor: As a district working with different development partners, we have constructed modern markets targeting the Burundian and Congolese market. Rwandan small-scale traders sell commodities across the borders whereas the Congolese traders from Bukavu bring a variety of commodities to Rusizi markets.

Qn: What are the current development activities the district is involved in that have changed the face of your city?

Mayor: Rusizi as a secondary city should be similar in many development aspects with Kigali city. It has, thus, undergone a facelift that has seen several shanty houses either demolished or renovated by the residents. And, the unfinished buildings that formerly made the city look underdeveloped and remote have been completed by willing residents. A number of storied and modern commercial buildings have been constructed according to the city's master plan alongside planting of ornament trees on several streets. The district encourages dwellers to maintain cleanliness and many strategies to beautify our home city are in place.

For instance, we have embarked on the planting of ornamental trees like palm trees in Giheke, Kamembe, Mururu, Rwimbogo, Gihundwe, Gashonga and Nzabarugama. The palm tree planting will roll out to all streets and sectors.

Planting the palm trees is part of the strategies to fast track our vision of making Rusizi a Green City. Construction of roads is ongoing as well and many have been completed.

Qn: Any efforts directed towards the promotion of tourism in the district?

Mayor: We've a variety of tourist attractions in Rusizi both natural and man-made, for instance, the number of hotels that are highly competitive is growing. Mantis Kivu Marina Bay Hotel, Progress Hotel, Centre Diocesian de Pastorale Incuti, Vive Hotel, Emeraude Kivu Resort are some on a long list. In the past, we never had such modern hotels in the area, and thus, this achievement is worth celebrating by residents, and guests can now be accommodated in decent hotels. There are two new 4-Star hotels under construction right in Lake Kivu and we're hopeful they will enhance hospitality services in Rusizi.

Mantis Kivu Marina Bay Hotel enjoys a vantage location where guests can enjoy the serene views of L. Kivu and the landscape of DRC. The hot springs in Bugarama also attract both local and international visitors.

Aside, cultural tourism is encouraged in Rusizi. For instance, the traditional dance known locally as 'Gusama' of the Abashi communities on Nkombo island and their language, Amashi form potential tourist attractions. Close to 80% of the residents here depend on fishing for a living and the district leadership has already considered how fishing in general can be promoted by availing fishing equipment.

Qn: How are you handling the recovery process of COVID-19 effects, especially in trade?

Mayor: Trade was negatively impacted. Before the Coronavirus pandemic, traders were working for nearly 24hrs. Following preventive measures imposed to contain the plague, working hours were limited up to 3pm currently which has reduced the volume of cross border trade.

Most small-scale traders had exited business. Nonetheless, through government recovery plans and working with partners many are resuming trade. They were supported with capital to restart and encouraged to form cooperatives among other interventions.

For security issues, Rusizi is very secure and security has never been part of the problems of the district, and we have not received any reports of mistreatment of Rwandan nationals on the DRC side where many trade.

Qn: How did the completion of Kivu Belt mean to the district?

Mayor: Surely, it was a positive response to the transport problems. Today, Rusizi

dwellers have options to reach Kigali either through the traditional (old) Nyungwe route or via Karongi. The cost of transport for both passengers and goods reduced as a result.

Qn: Lastly, what are the ongoing projects you have?

Mayor: The palm tree planting is part of the broad strategy to overhaul the city's cleanliness and is underway. Tujyanemo Rusizi is undertaking a 500 houses project which aims at building the houses for the most vulnerable residents that are currently homeless. Recently, we met with the natives of Rusizi living and working across the country as well as those in the diaspora and all are literally positive about our development initiatives. Our aim is to ensure that no one is left behind in development.