Rwanda’s efforts to develop its secondary cities will depend not only on expanding roads and basic services but also on whether infrastructure investment helps businesses grow and creates employment, a World Bank report says.

The report, *Sub-Saharan Africa’s Urban Awakening: Catalyzing Economic Growth and Job Creation*, argues that smaller urban centres can become important sources of employment and economic activity, particularly when they are connected to markets, transport corridors and areas of agricultural production.

Rwanda has been pursuing urban development beyond Kigali through programmes targeting six secondary cities: Huye, Muhanga, Musanze, Nyagatare, Rubavu and Rusizi.

The Rwanda Urban Development Project, implemented with World Bank support, has focused on improving infrastructure and services in Kigali and the six cities, while strengthening urban management and resilience. Its second phase includes investments in roads, pedestrian walkways, drainage, street lighting and urban planning.

But the World Bank report cautions that infrastructure alone does not guarantee that towns and cities will generate more productive employment.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, it identifies weak market access, poor connectivity and inadequate basic services as constraints affecting many smaller towns. These challenges can make it difficult for businesses to expand, connect with suppliers and reach customers.

The report says towns with stronger economic advantages, including proximity to major markets, transport corridors, borders and productive agricultural areas, have greater potential to become centres of trade and employment.

It recommends directing integrated infrastructure investment towards places where it can unlock those advantages, rather than distributing limited public resources evenly across all settlements.

For towns with fewer commercial advantages, the report suggests prioritising education, health and other services that improve residents’ ability to access employment in stronger labour markets.

The approach also requires a predictable regulatory environment and efforts to

attract private investment, the report says. Roads, drainage and other public infrastructure can provide the foundation for business activity, but firms also need suitable locations and conditions that support investment and expansion.

The six secondary cities covered by Rwanda’s urban development programme are Huye, Muhanga, Musanze, Nyagatare, Rubavu and Rusizi. The World Bank report says investment in such towns should take account of their economic potential, including their links to markets, transport routes and agricultural production.