

Rwandan senators are raising concerns over environmental damage, weak management and poor working conditions in the Masoro industrial zone, highlighting challenges in one of the country's key manufacturing areas.

Members of the Senate Committee on Economy and Finance said the zone still has residents living alongside factories, despite its designation for industrial use. Workers there also lack basic services, including adequate places to eat and other essential amenities.

The concerns come as Rwanda positions its 11 industrial zones as central to its five-year development plan. The government aims to double private investment from \$2.2 billion, or 15.9% of gross domestic product, to \$4.6 billion, or 21.5%, by 2029.

Sen. Frank Habineza pointed to environmental risks linked to poor wastewater management, saying industrial discharge flows into the Mulindi wetland and onward to Nyandungu Park, threatening biodiversity.

He said the continued presence of residents within the zone exposes them to hazards such as industrial emissions and undermines efforts to separate residential and industrial activity. In some areas, factories producing construction materials operate close to occupied homes.

Officials from the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) said many of the zone's challenges stem from gaps in its management structure. Michelle Umurungi, the agency's head of investment, said the Masoro site lacks a private operator responsible for day-to-day management — a model used in other zones such as Bugesera.

She said weaknesses in early contracts and poor oversight by the previous operator led to deteriorating infrastructure and broader operational problems. The government terminated the operator's concession in January 2024, after which RDB took over temporary supervision.

Authorities are now seeking a new private partner expected to address environmental issues, including wastewater treatment, and improve overall management. In the meantime, public institutions are overseeing operations.

Plans are also underway to expand the zone with additional phases to meet growing investor demand, particularly in Kigali. However, the presence of residents in

planned expansion areas means relocation will be necessary, a process officials say depends on available government funding and reflects similar challenges in other industrial zones.

Lawmakers said infrastructure gaps also affect workers' daily lives. Habineza cited a lack of proper dining facilities, limited parking and insufficient support services, noting that some employees work extended hours without adequate provisions.

Naftal Kazora, an RDB industrial inspection officer, acknowledged that issues exist in a zone employing more than 20,000 people but said authorities work with local labor inspectors to resolve disputes, including cases of unfair dismissal.

He added that future management will be required to improve infrastructure and services, with space already allocated for expanded facilities, including those intended for workers.