

Rwanda's chief statistician has raised concerns over persistently high levels of child stunting in Gicumbi District, despite the area recording lower poverty rates than the national average, pointing to mindset and leadership gaps as key contributing factors.

Ivan Murenzi, Director General of the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), said data shows that while poverty in Gicumbi stands at 13% well below the national rate of 27%, the district has the country's highest rate of stunting among children under five, at 40%.

Murenzi made the remarks while presenting a performance review during the National Dialogue Council, Umushyikirano, Rwanda's annual forum bringing together leaders and citizens.

"An analysis shows this is not a question of lack of resources," Murenzi said. "Gicumbi is rich in milk, livestock and other food products. The real issue lies in mindset and limited understanding of nutrition."

He explained that some households prioritize selling nutritious foods such as milk and eggs, while children are fed less balanced meals, contributing to chronic malnutrition.

President Paul Kagame echoed the concern, saying responsibility should not be placed solely on households but also on leaders at various levels.

"It is easy to blame citizens and stop there," Kagame said. "But when a district has wealth, milk, chickens and eggs, and children are still stunted, then leadership must also take responsibility."

Kagame added that development challenges that persist for five to 10 years without resolution should be directly attributed to failures in leadership and accountability.

Murenzi used the discussion to highlight progress made in other sectors over the past two decades, arguing that Rwanda's development gains demonstrate that entrenched challenges can be overcome. He cited improvements in healthcare, noting that in 2000 only 27% of women gave birth in health facilities, while just 8% of the population had health insurance. Today, facility-based deliveries stand at 98%, and health insurance coverage exceeds 90%.

He also pointed to housing and infrastructure improvements. In 2000, about 15% of

Rwandans lived in grass-thatched houses, while electricity access stood at 5%. Currently, grass-thatched housing has been eliminated, and electricity coverage has surpassed 80%.

“These achievements once seemed impossible,” Murenzi said. “Yet in just 25 years, they became reality. This shows that even today’s challenges are solvable.”

However, he warned of mounting pressure on the labor market, noting that about 26,000 people mostly young graduates who enter the job market each year. Murenzi urged stronger collaboration between government and the private sector to create employment opportunities, emphasizing that public institutions alone cannot absorb the growing workforce.