

More than 7,600 Rwandan girls have entered traditionally male-dominated professions thanks to a two-decade-old education campaign led by Imbuto Foundation, the organization's director said Saturday.

Speaking at the 20th anniversary celebration of the *Inkubito z'Icyeza* (Seeds of Hope) program, Shami Elodie, Director General of Imbuto Foundation, praised the initiative's impact in empowering young women across Rwanda.

"These have been 20 years of progress and triumph," she said. "Today we celebrate the dreamers, the courageous girls of *Inkubito z'Icyeza* who have shown what is possible when girls are given a chance."



Launched in 2005 by Rwanda's First Lady, Jeannette Kagame, the campaign was designed to encourage girls to stay in school, excel academically, and pursue leadership roles. Since then, thousands have gone on to become doctors, journalists, soldiers, entrepreneurs and more.

This year, 471 girls are being recognized for academic excellence, with 123 receiving awards at a national ceremony held at Intare Conference Arena in Kigali. Others will be honored in their respective schools.

The annual recognition includes school supplies, financial incentives to encourage saving, and technology training for high school graduates.

"These girls aren't just awarded and left behind," Elodie said. "We follow them through mentorship and forums that support their intellectual and emotional growth throughout high school and beyond."

She also thanked parents and educators for their support, acknowledging the challenges they face in helping girls succeed.

"We're proud of the harvest from the seeds we planted," Elodie said. "But we know it hasn't been easy, and we are grateful for the solutions you've found to help raise a generation."

She urged program alumni to continue being role models and changemakers.

"Be the answer to today's challenges and to Rwanda's future," she said.

The *Inkubito z'Icyeza* initiative is part of Imbuto Foundation's broader efforts to address gender disparities in education by empowering girls through academic recognition and long-term mentorship.