

Rwanda's National Women's Council is urging more women to seek local leadership positions ahead of elections beginning this week, saying limited participation in grassroots governance remains a challenge despite the country's commitment to gender equality.

The campaign, led by the council in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, aims to encourage women to contest elections, vote and take part in decisions affecting their communities.

Nyirajyambere Belancille, president of the National Women's Council, said women had received training to build their confidence, improve their leadership skills and help them overcome barriers to entering public office.

"We are encouraging the women we represent, from village to district level, to stand for election, participate in voting and take up positions in local government," Nyirajyambere said.



*Nyirajyambere Belancille, president of the National Women's Council*

The campaign comes as Rwanda prepares for a new round of local government elections, beginning at village level on Oct. 24, followed by cell-level elections on Oct. 31 and sector-level elections on Nov. 7, according to the National Electoral Commission.

Women's representation varies across local leadership positions, with the National Women's Council identifying grassroots administration as an area where greater participation is needed.

Nyirajyambere said women account for 23% of representation at district level. They hold 18% of deputy district mayor positions responsible for economic affairs, compared with 74% of those responsible for social affairs, she said.

At village level, women account for 18% of leadership, while their representation at sector level stands at 19%, according to the council president.

Rwanda's Constitution provides for women to occupy at least 30% of positions in decision-making organs. Electoral law also provides for women's representation in district councils through designated seats, although the specific arrangements differ

across governance structures.

The council's training focuses on decision-making, public speaking during election campaigns, identifying suitable leadership positions and making effective use of women's skills. Participants are also encouraged to overcome self-doubt and recognise their ability to lead.

The campaign extends to young people and persons with disabilities, with the council seeking broader participation in local governance.

Nyirajyambere said the council wanted to remove obstacles that prevent women from entering leadership and enable them to contribute more fully to Rwanda's long-term development goals under Vision 2050.

The election process will continue through November, with the executive committees of the National Women's Council, National Youth Council and National Council of Persons with Disabilities due to be elected at national level on Nov. 30. The full composition of the councils is expected to be completed by Dec. 15, according to the published electoral calendar.