

Industry

TODAY

ISSUE 5 | DECEMBER 2025 – FEBRUARY 2026

A Magazine of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers



BUILDING STRONGER HOW MSMEs ARE FUELLING GROWTH



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Securing the future of manufacturing through SME Development



Tobias Alando
Chief Executive
Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM)

“

SMEs are the heartbeat of Kenya's manufacturing driving innovation, jobs, and resilience for a stronger economy

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the engine of industrial growth and economic development. Across Kenya's manufacturing landscape, SMEs are the engine of industrial growth and economic resilience. They are the innovators, job creators, and value-chain connectors that keep our economy dynamic, adaptive, and forward-looking.

At Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), we believe that building a stronger manufacturing sector begins with empowering MSMEs to scale, formalize, and compete effectively both locally and globally. MSMEs account for the majority of manufacturing enterprises in Kenya and play a pivotal role in employment creation, regional development, and innovation. When MSMEs thrive, industries expand, communities prosper, and the nation grows.

However, the journey for MSMEs is not without challenges. Access to affordable financing, reliable energy, quality infrastructure, skilled labour, and predictable policy environments are critical factors needed to steer their growth. Addressing these constraints requires collaboration between government, private sector players, financial institutions, and development partners. As KAM, we continue to advocate for reforms that lower the cost of doing business, support local production, and integrate MSMEs into regional and global value chains.

Through our SME Hub, we continuously support manufacturing SMEs to scale up and thrive. We have developed tailor-made solutions, aimed at strengthening SMEs' capacity, promoting standards and quality compliance, and supporting the adoption of technology and sustainable manufacturing practices. Through these services, our goal is to enhance their competitiveness, particularly in a rapidly evolving global economy built on innovation, efficiency, and resilience, rising to this challenge.

As we pursue Kenya's industrialization goals and the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda, SMEs must remain at the center of our manufacturing strategy. By nurturing their growth, we are not only building stronger enterprises but also building a stronger, more inclusive economy for all Kenyans.

In this edition of the Industry Today Magazine, we bring you stories of how manufacturing SMEs are fueling our country's growth. Let us continue to work together to unlock the full potential of MSMEs and shape a manufacturing sector that is robust, competitive, and future-ready.

Strengthening Kenya, Nigeria trade

KAM hosted the Kenya–Nigeria Trade and Investment Mission in Lagos, aimed at strengthening bilateral trade relations, link Kenyan businesses to Nigerian partners, and unlock new export opportunities under AfCFTA. The mission was supported by UK International Development, FCDO, implemented through TradeMark Africa under the REDIT Project.

Some of the key activities included B2B matchmaking forums; stakeholder engagements with Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), standards authorities, and trade facilitation agencies; industry visits to manufacturing plants across textiles, pharmaceuticals, and FMCG sectors; and policy dialogue on addressing NTBs, logistics challenges, and strengthening trade facilitation.

The trade mission realized various successes, with over 60 B2B meetings conducted, multiple export leads generated across sectors including processed foods and commitments to pursue mutual market access, standards alignment, and continuous engagement with Nigerian partners.

Delegates identified deals requiring follow-up support in logistics, market validation, and certification.

High Level Breakfast Forum with the National Assembly Departmental Committee on Finance and National Planning



KAM, with support from the British High Commission in Kenya (FCDO) and Trademark Africa (TMA), held a high-level breakfast forum with the National Assembly Departmental Committee on Finance and National Planning. The forum provided an opportunity to reflect on the Finance Bill and Act of 2025 wins, and strategic plans for the manufacturing sector in the next budget cycle in 2026.

Speaking at the forum, KAM Vice Chairperson Hitesh Mediratta highlighted the importance of the manufacturing sector to the country's economy. He appreciated the Committee for its support in achieving some key wins through the Finance Act 2025 and other tax policy reforms. He reiterated KAM's commitment to continued collaboration with the National Assembly Committee of Finance and National Planning to strengthen the manufacturing sector, address its challenges, and build a solid foundation for the coming year. He also highlighted several issues currently affecting the sector.

KAM Members also shared the challenges they continue to encounter in their operations, noting that issues such as high energy costs, the need for policy and legal reforms, delays in VAT refunds, concerns over carry-forward tax losses, and tax competitiveness within the EAC particularly regarding the taxation of Kraft Paper. They further highlighted challenges related to the Excisable Goods Management System (EGMS) in the beverage industry and the excise duty imposed on PVC edge banding. Despite these concerns, members expressed optimism that continued engagement with the Committee will help drive meaningful solutions and strengthen the manufacturing sector going forward.

Hon. FCPA Rutto Julius, Member of the National Assembly Departmental Committee on Finance and National Planning, expressed his gratitude to KAM for the ongoing engagements aimed at strengthening the manufacturing sector. He assured members that continuous dialogue and collaboration will be sustained to address the key issues they raised. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of continued partnership between KAM and the Committee to ensure a thriving and resilient manufacturing sector.



Editor's Message

There is a moment most of us can trace back to, even if we did not recognize it at the time. In school, there was always one student selling sweets from a bag, swapping football cards, photocopying notes for a small fee, or finding a way to turn scarcity into opportunity. We did not call it entrepreneurship then. It was simply a way of figuring things out: how to make a little money, meet a need, and get by.

Years later, those same instincts are what fuel small and medium-sized enterprises across Kenya. They may look more formal now: registered businesses, payrolls, supply chains, but at their core, they are driven by the same problem-solving mindset learned early: see a gap, fill it, and keep going despite the odds.

This fifth issue of Industry Today looks beyond surface-level success stories. It goes behind the scenes to explore what it truly takes to build stronger MSMEs: what works, what does not, and where support structures fall short. The stories and insights in this edition reflect resilience, adaptation, and the quiet determination that keeps businesses moving forward even in uncertain conditions.

At a time when youth unemployment remains a pressing concern, strengthening MSMEs is not optional. It is one of the most practical pathways to job creation, skills development, and inclusive growth. It is also how Kenyan-made products find their way from local markets to regional and global stages.

Building stronger is not about overnight wins. It is about creating environments where early instincts can mature into sustainable enterprises, and where the next generation sees possibility, not limitation.



Lawrence Njenga, HSC
Head of Corporate,
Marketing and Membership

As always, thank you for being part of our readership. Your engagement fuels our commitment to deliver a magazine that informs, entertains, and inspires.

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SUPPLEMENT FEATURE

How Kenya's Retail Giant Has Kept Its Crown

When Naivas Supermarket opened its first store in Rongai 35 years ago, few would have imagined it would one day become the undisputed leader of Kenya's retail sector.

Today, with over 100 stores across the country and a workforce exceeding 12,000, Naivas has not only defied the odds but rewritten the script of what sustainable retail success looks like in East Africa.

Its story is not just one of numbers, although its rapid growth, geographic reach, and consumer loyalty are impressive. It is a story of smart site selection, laser focus on customer experience, honest partnerships, and a people-first philosophy that places both staff and community at the heart of their business.

At the core of Naivas' growth is a meticulous expansion strategy. While other supermarket chains have faltered under the weight of unchecked growth, this retail giant has expanded only where it makes economic and operational sense.

"We've only taken on new stores when we believe we can afford it and when the site proves viable," explains Andreas von Paleske, Naivas' Chief of Strategy.

He says the retailer's format varies depending on the market where some stores are large, offering everything from food to electronics and fashion, while others in lower-density areas are smaller, focusing on essential goods.

This adaptability ensures every branch is profitable and adds value to the brand, creating what von Paleske describes as a "flywheel effect": satisfied customers generate revenue, which funds growth, which in turn attracts more customers.

Since its inception, Naivas has clung tightly to one enduring promise 'Naivas saves you money!' But beyond competitive pricing, the chain has embedded "customer obsession" into its operational

DNA.

"We believe in serving customers well given that Kenyan customers are discerning and demand high levels of service," says von Paleske.

This philosophy is why Naivas has not rushed into automated self-checkouts like retailers in other countries. "Our customer wants human interaction, not just speed," he adds.

Personalisation, however, is an evolving frontier. The retail chain is currently investing in AI-driven systems that forecast demand, automate stock replenishment, and provide tailored experiences via its app and loyalty program. The goal? Keep customers happy, engaged, and coming back.

In a sector often plagued by opaque dealings and fragile supply chains, Naivas has cultivated a reputation for honest, transparent relationships with both suppliers and staff.

Von Paleske is emphatic about this, noting that it is not always that a business will be delivering positive messages to its employee's for instance.

"When things are tougher, things like an annual bonus become harder, so we build trust with our staff by being candid pointing out our results for the year and explain that paying a bonus will be more challenging," he says, adding that it is this honesty that has built trust, loyalty, and long-term commitment.

The same principle applies to suppliers. Over 80 percent of what Naivas sells is locally sourced, thanks to Kenya's well established manufacturing base.

But beyond this, the retail chain is keen on supporting local SME's to showcase their capacity and this is premised on the 'Buy Kenya Build Kenya' principle.

It is also informed by the appreciation that the only way the retail



Congratulations



We proudly congratulate Naivas on their 35 remarkable years of quality customer service.






Hongera Naivas!

Your journey is a true testament to resilience, innovation, and a strong commitment to serving communities across Kenya. Over the years, you have grown into a trusted household name, delivering quality, convenience, and value to millions of customers. We wish you continued success and many more years of growth and impact.

Happy 35th Anniversary, Naivas!




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chain can stay on a growth trajectory is through working collaboratively with its suppliers that include farmers, manufacturers, and distributors.



“We don’t just talk about listing a product, rather we discuss category planning, pricing strategies, and long-term collaboration all in efforts to create a win-win with our partners,” he says.

This explains the thinking behind Naivas centralised supply chain that is targeted at cutting distribution costs and boost efficiency across the entire system.

“We believe it is much more efficient for us to distribute the goods to stores directly rather than suppliers visiting each one of our stores and dropping off goods with few cases coming to our head office,” he says.

In partnership with the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), Naivas is exploring initiatives to further promote the “Buy Kenya, Build Kenya” agenda, including in-store events, brand showcases, and pricing collaborations to make goods more affordable.

With over 12,000 staff directly on its payroll, Naivas ranks among the largest private employers in Kenya. But the company is not content with simply creating jobs, rather its aim is to build careers.

“It’s not uncommon for someone to join as a line attendant and rise to become a store manager or even take on a role at the head office,” says von Paleske. “We invest in training and offer staff benefits such as healthcare, discounts, and a strong remuneration policy.”

This deep investment in human capital does not just improve service delivery, it fuels internal loyalty and professional pride, ensuring institutional knowledge is preserved and passed on.

Environmental responsibility is also a growing pillar of the business. Through its ESG programme, Naivas recycles paper, cardboard, and plastic, and supports local manufacturers who convert waste into usable products.

“We want to be a point of aggregation, where we collect waste, reduce our environmental footprint, and still deliver value,” he says.

Whether responding to national crises like flooding or quietly supporting orphanages, schools, and local charities, Naivas stores are deeply embedded in the communities they serve.

“Our focus isn’t solely on what people spend at our stores; we care about how we can give back, because if the community thrives, so does the store,” von Paleske affirms.

This hyperlocal engagement, branch by branch, town by town, reinforces the retail chain’s identity as both a thriving business and a responsible corporate citizen. As Naivas marks 35 years in business, the focus is firmly on the future.

While accolades like “East Africa’s Choice Supermarket” affirm its popularity, the real measure of success lies in long-term sustainability.

“We want to be here for the next 35 years and beyond. That means being responsible—financially, socially, and environmentally,” says von Paleske.

“Our biggest legacy, though, will be our people; we want to be remembered as a business that created careers, shaped livelihoods, and became an employer of choice,” he concludes.



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Congratulations Naivas!

Congratulations to Naivas on reaching an incredible 35-year milestone! As a fellow Kenyan brand, we are inspired by your journey of hard work, vision, and unwavering commitment to customer satisfaction. It is an honor to witness your continued impact on the community and your dedication to setting the standard for quality. We wish you many more years of success and even greater milestones ahead.

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Wishing you continued success and many more years of prosperity!



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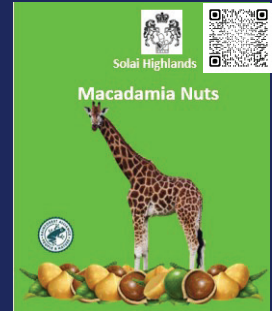
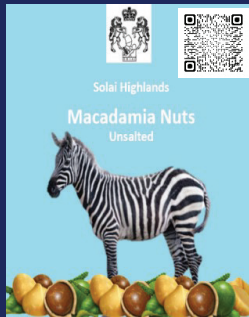
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Inside Harriet's Plan to Strengthen Kenya's Manufacturing Sector

By Cynthia Atuo

When she walks into a room, Harriet Ng'ok Chebet's aura commands attention: a composure of someone who is confident about what they are doing, owing to her years of experience navigating entrepreneurship. Much so that the world of Manufacturing has realized her potential, recently electing her as the Chairperson of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) SME Hub.

With just three months into her election, disparities in the SME sector still glare. Coupled with a number of industry disruptions that continue to affect SMEs in Kenya, risking their growth. Despite these concerns, Harriet enters this space with an urgency to steady a

sector that has been rowing in murky waters for years.

She describes it as an interesting environment for Kenya's SMEs, characterized by disruptions attributed to the 2024 finance bill events, coupled with a tightened economic climate that has forced the country to aggressively mobilize capital to repay back debts, thus redefining how SMEs operate.

"SMEs are witnessing less consumer spending, and even when customers shop frequently, it's often smaller baskets hence spending less money. As a result, the 'Kadogo economy' has now been formalized and institutionalized, meaning that SMEs now spend

more time in customer service than the bottom line; the margins have shrunk and there is need to internally organize ourselves," she says.

Notably, with the new tax landscape that comes with additional obligations like Social Health Authority (SHA), NITA (national Industrial Training Authority) and housing levies, SMEs have been forced to either meet these tax obligations or pay employees more. Either way, spending power lowers and thus circling back to businesses which are now on a lifeline.

But even in the midst of these uncertainties and pressures, Harriet's mandate is to reposition the SME Hub through several strategies.

She opines that policy literacy is her first line of defence, ensuring that KAM is at the forefront of creating awareness around policies that affect SMEs. The hub runs a lot of awareness sessions to help SMEs understand, adapt to, and influence the regulations that shape their business environment. This, in addition to gathering information and data from SMEs, analysing it and sending back feedback to regulators as well as the businesses.

This responsiveness has seen KAM achieve several advocacy wins such as the removal of the interest limitation (EBITDA) restriction in the Finance Act 2023, the reversal of VAT on exported services, and the ongoing fight for prompt payments (particularly from government and large retailers) have offered critical breathing room to SMEs.

The Retail Code of Practice that was signed by both Kam and the Association of Kenyan Suppliers, is also a milestone achievement that has eliminated delayed payments that tend to affect many SMEs.

Finance still remains a huge setback for SMEs as the traditional collateral based lending locks out most SMEs from accessing capital.

"Most SMEs lack the collateral required by banks. So, new forms of financing had to be developed. Through KAM's partnerships with Equity and KCB banks, the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE) Ibuka program and a blend of financiers including the KUA program, we are seeing alternative financing models such as the convertible debt, grants lending, and other mixed instruments to support the SMEs," says Harriet.

While these efforts can prove fruitful, unfortunately, many SMEs do not know that they have these options, let alone the know-how to structure themselves to qualify for such financing.

She reckons that compliance and regulatory requirements is also a hurdle that most businesses face as they lack proper knowledge and how it affects them. At the same time, paper work, digital system, and frequent regulatory changes can be overwhelming for small businesses, paving way for informal suppliers.

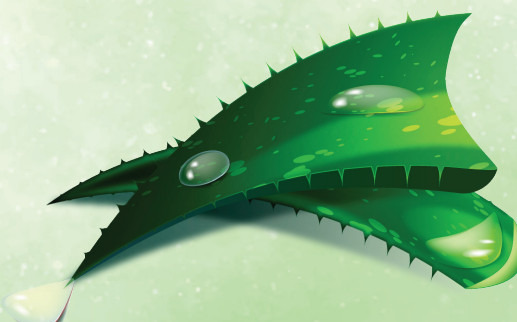
With tools like eTIMS in place, she points out that it has been effective in filtering out informal suppliers who don't meet the requirements, making the environment more structured and favourable for SMEs.

"It's good for SMEs in the long run, but painful in the short run. This is what there has been a lot of advocacy about policy by KAM," states Harriet.

But even in the face of imminent disruptions, technology has proved to be the major disruptor for SMEs, challenging how they operate and adapt to ensure they survive an industry that keeps evolving every day.

The SME Hub has now prioritized industry visits, benchmarking, and partnerships with innovation enablers such as Bloblast. Harriet believes that seeing technology in action triggers a mindset shift: "You can only learn faster when you witness how others are doing it."

Fun Fact
Aloe Vera is a
natural air filter



And even as Kenya is diverse in talent and skills, particularly among the young generations, the shortage is in the middle to senior management. For instance, small businesses don't attract the best talent and can't afford them. With the KAM business growth program, SMEs are trained to hire the right people who can help accelerate business growth.

Sustainability is also inevitable in businesses whether startup or established, and as such, it is an imminent regulation. With Kenya recycling an estimated 98% of the plastic it uses, SMEs are already part of a fast-adapting ecosystem. She believes upcoming laws will push further changes in materials and packaging. "It will be like the single-use plastic ban and everyone will simply have to adjust."

Looking into the future, and she adjusts to her new role, her conviction is clear. That Kenya can become East Africa's (and continent-wide) powerhouse in manufacturing. But this can only be possible once the sector and SMEs in especially, adapt to new technology, particularly deep tech, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Internet of Things (IoT).

Under her leadership, the SME Hub is not only a support structure but also a place that equips entrepreneurs to navigate disruption, organize better internally, enter new markets with confidence, and adapt to technologies shaping the next industrial wave.

So far, she attributes several SME success stories to KAM's incubation, acceleration, or scale-up programs. The Changamka editions for instance, both in Nairobi and Mombasa, have been instrumental platforms for visibility and sales.

This year alone KAM has empowered over 370 SMEs through operational excellence training, export readiness programs, standards, intellectual property, and finance access support. They include the Retail Ready partnering for growth workshop with Naivas to empower local small and medium-sized enterprises and unlock new opportunities.

KAM sought to enhance competitiveness and market access for Kenyan SMEs in the AFCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area) market. Under the initiative, 111 SMEs across various sectors and 63 SMEs received direct one-on-one coaching support with export experts to support the design of export plans.

"Participating in these programs can help SMEs navigate the markets and it gives them a lot of legitimacy in the industry," concludes Harriet whose strategy is pegged on policy advocacy and tech adaptation.





Cold-Pressed Ambition Inside Kenya's Global Avocado Oil Disruptor

By Margaret Kanini

Avocado oil is relatively a newcomer in the vegetable oil market, but quickly gaining popularity in Kenya and globally. Crofts limited is a Kenyan company that is taking the world by storm, in producing high-quality extra virgin Avocado oil.

Tucked within Thika town in Kenya, Crofts Limited has been in the business of producing globally competitive avocado oil since 2015, just two years after arriving in Kenya.

Researchers reveal that, Avocado oil, thanks to the antioxidant and phenolic content found in Avocados, can be a good alternative to olive oil, depending on what temperature the avocados are stored in, and the length of time they are stored.

Miraj Shah and Mitul Shah, the co-founders behind this brand, explain that, Crofts limited works with Kenyan smallholder farmers to source for unripe, mature and best quality Avocado types, especially the Hass type which is considered the best for export oil.

Within Croft's 26,000 square-foot godown structure in Thika, and using some of the most advanced and effective mechanical technologies, these avocados are cold-pressed into oil brand that sells better in the global market than in the Kenyan market.

"We don't sell a lot of Crofts Avocado oil locally, mainly because we face packaging challenges and poor or less competitive prices for the product. Our packaging material is a unique type of glass that we import from Italy. It is currently unavailable in Kenya, and we feel it is cheaper for our European customers to buy the oil in bulk package, then customized their packaging in their own countries. It is also a challenge working with supermarkets or retailers here

in Kenya. The payment terms are not always honored and they want us to supply to all their branches in Kenya. However, a small percentage of our oil is available in local food stores like Zucchini" Says Miraj Shah, the Co-founder and CEO

Crofts has been exporting 98 percent of their Extra-Virgin and crude Avocado oil to the Western Europe, North America, Australia, India and China markets since 2015.

Research reveals that Kenya produces close to 400,000 metric tons of Avocado oil annually and Crofts is a key industry player, processing 100 Metric-tons of Avocado oil daily, which yields 5-6 Metric-tons per day. This translates to over 300,000 tons processed annually, yielding between 1500- 1800 tons annually.

Crofts limited also thrives in maximizing the profitability of the avocados, and are keen on reducing wastage, because while 40% of the total avocados sourced for oil processing in Kenya goes to waste, Crofts uses what is unsellable to produce their crude oil and the remains of the extraction are converted to biogas and organic fertilizer.

Crofts has encountered numerous "disruptive storms" along the way, as Miraj explains

"Around two years ago, international movement of goods was disrupted by the Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Palestine wars, and Crofts was caught up in that storm. We experienced increased shipping costs and closing off of shipping routes to Europe, which has been our core market. It was difficult getting shipping containers and getting space on shipping lines. In our business, COVID 19 also came with a different storm, which affected our period of voyage. Transit length



that was initially done in 20-25 days, turned to about 70 days. We all know that currency stability is very key in export market. The US Dollar and Euro fluctuation we have witnessed in recent times affected our business and we ended up focusing predominantly on exports to Asian and Australia, avoiding the Europe and the USA" He explains

According to Miraj, export business cannot entirely depend on trade with the Europe and the USA, they have to diversify to other continents, like Asia and Australia to thrive.

"People in Europe and the US are not willing to pay 100% upfront for exports. Whereas, Kenyan businesses who want to import things from these continents or countries must pay 100% of the invoices. So, that gap in cash flow is something that is quite critical" says Miraj

The major economic challenges in Kenya that Crofts must endure include; the hostile duties and increasingly changing policies and laws for businesses.

"We are witnessing Kenya is introducing new policies every day, and we have to be constantly alert to know what the policies and tax laws mean for our business. If we were to import our glass bottles for instance, that would attract 25% import duty, 35% excise, 60% VAT. And then an additional 9% worth of import charges. MSS, RDL, you know, all of those levies" said Miraj

"We find that Kenya's economic trade dynamics are very volatile, especially under this new government. So, we have been focusing on adjusting our business in terms of how we source our raw materials, and that determines what volumes we can actually produce and which markets we are trying to target." Miraj Shah continues.

Kenya is currently a digitally dominant business landscape, but Miraj says that Crofts, being Business-to-Business (B2B) rather than Business-to-Customer (B2C) oriented, is not fully impacted by this, except that with almost all the processes happening online, it has reduced paper work and eased recruitment processes for Crofts.

"Infact, cyber security is one of our fears. Even with the increased online technologies, we find everything is too fragmented, so that businesses have to subscribe to many different platforms to be able to get services that they need and that brings in a lot of cyber security and data management risks" Said Miraj

"We try to manage our digital infrastructure internally, but we have outsourced some of the cyber security and IT infrastructure that we require for now. In reality, Kenya needs a little bit more aligned and focused solutions so that businesses don't have to turn to 10 or 15 different service providers for the same thing" He explains.

Avocado oil production at Crofts limited is on midsize scale, so, the oil producer employs new and advanced technology of oil presser machines, the centrifuge technology, immersion and jet showering machines and colloid mills among to remain competitive globally. Miraj explains there is a need for constant innovation at crofts to produce oil that meets international standard

"Our technology is mainly the machinery and our policy in upgrading has always been that, there must be a balance between innovation and the risk involved in investing in emerging technologies. Crofts pays attention to reliability, added efficiency and cost, so we don't end up introducing what we can do without" says Miraj.

Crofts is currently employing close to 100 people, majority of whom are seasonal stuff, because the firm's operations are seasonal in nature.

Due to its nature of increased technical processes, Crofts' organizational culture includes upskilling and reskilling their employees, especially during the off-seasons, which are usually from the month of October.

"We are committed to investing in our employees. During off-season, we send them for short engineering course from our partner institutions of higher learning and sending others to organizations for training and learning." said Miraj.



How a Kenyan Company is Positioning itself for Africa's Industrial Future

Africa's manufacturing sector is at a critical juncture owing to several industry disruptions that have intensified its deeply rooted challenges. Global supply chain vulnerabilities, infrastructure, geopolitical instability, currency volatilities, and rapid technological shifts are some of the major disruptions that have seen countries like Kenya for instance, perform dismally, contributing only 7.2 per cent to the country's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in 2024, from about 7.6 per cent in 2023. Both, well below the World Bank's global average of 12.05 per cent.

This dismal performance has forced Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), manufacturers in particular, to navigate ways to unlock new opportunities. At the helm of this defining moment, Kenneth Karuri, CEO of Seven Twenty Holdings Ltd believes that for Kenya (and the wider continent) to position itself competitively and at a global stage, local manufacturers need to reduce our dependence on finished imports and start producing and exporting high-value raw materials.

It is against this backdrop that his company, is tapping into this opportunity, offering a rare view of how Africa's manufacturing sector could look like:

Seven Twenty Holdings is a leading manufacturer of metal products in Kenya ranging from curtain rods accessories, window and door accessories, and gate and grill decorative pieces. Since its inception in 2012, what started as a small bedroom start-up by two university classmates fresh from campus producing only 100 units per day, today the company has grown to 1000 units, bridging the demand gap for finished products.

Drawing lessons from a German expo held at the KICC, coupled with some engineering background from the University of Nairobi, Karuri and his co-founder invested 30, 000 and bought a welding machine which they used to draw architectural auto cards and metal products. That's how the idea of curtain rods and bedside tables was born.

"We were not manufacturing; we were just buying this from Gikomba and adding value to them by welding then reselling. Curtain rods became the golden goose that laid some eggs and the goose is



still laying those eggs,” says Karuri, noting that the name Seven Twenty reflects his philosophy: two complete circles representing engineering and re-engineering.

The company has now further evolved to manufacturing architectural paint products (interior, and exterior paints and wall fillers) as well as ecofriendly and sustainable outdoor solar powered security lights.

How Disruptions reshaping the manufacturing industry has affected Seven Twenty

But even as Seven Twenty is witnessing notable expansion in its line of products, Karuri notes that over the past 3 to 5 years, they have also felt the impact of the disruptions in the manufacturing sector, which have forced the company to adjust in order to stay ahead of its game.

Key disruptions include:

♦ Global supply chain constraints:

Small manufacturers often feel the ripple effects of international policies and logistics. Karuri notes,

“Two months ago, for instance, we wanted to buy a high-precision machine, but despite paying for it, shipping was delayed due to declarations required from abroad. Global events, even just looking at statements by the US president about China, can directly affect our operations,” says Karuri.

♦ Import dependence and tariffs:

The reliance on imported raw materials exposes manufacturers to fluctuating prices and hidden costs, including shipping, customs, and varying tariffs. These factors can lock up capital and create operational uncertainty.

♦ Price volatility of raw materials:

Materials are often sold in different grades, and quality inconsistencies can add to costs. As a result, this compromises on quality even though the appearance might be the same.

“I’d advise people to build relationships with multiple suppliers before buying raw materials so you can compare and beat the price,” notes Karuri.

♦ Competition from Asia:

Imported products, especially from China, continue to dominate the market due to perceived quality and aesthetics, challenging local manufacturers to maintain both standards and competitiveness.

♦ Operational scaling challenges:

Karuri observes that “small businesses face small problems; when you grow, the problems become much bigger.” As production scales, issues such as workforce management, machinery efficiency, and timely access to inputs become more pronounced.

♦ Technological evolution:

Inevitably, technology has been the biggest, every day it keeps changing and manufacturers therefore have to keep replacing their machines and embrace automation and Artificial Intelligence.

“We have a machine which we started with but now it’s sitting idle because it’s no longer useful, and we only used it for one year,” he stresses.

How Seven Twenty is Staying Ahead of these Disruptions and Remaining Competitive

With the industry disruptions persisting, manufacturers are now forced to find ways to remain resilient. To stay ahead of the

game while remaining competitive as it targets leading the African market, Karuri notes that Seven Twenty is leveraging technology to diversify its products while reducing operational costs.

Keeping up with Technology

Investing in a modern power press machine transformed the company’s production from 100 units to 1000 units due to its



versatility: besides producing curtain rods, the power press machine can also make other accessories such as flowers, cups, and rings. The only thing that needs to be changed is the mold machine.

Technological adoption, including AI and automation, benchmarking against both local and global peers, and exploring trends via online platforms, positions the company at the forefront of the sector

Maintaining High Quality

Also, for a product made locally, we ensure that the quality is higher. The rods for instance are very sturdy and heavy, because you see when you import something, they look at the volume, the weight, so if they can make it as light as possible, the better for easy transport. But for us we look at quality.

The company constantly seeks new products that address real customer needs while differentiating itself from foreign competitors through superior quality, reliable service, and adherence to standards, starting with careful sourcing of raw materials.

Some of its customized solutions include on-site consultations with clients, ensuring products meet practical requirements and strengthening client relationships. Long-term resilience is reinforced through dedicated research and development teams, continuous staff training, and a collaborative mindset, recognizing that innovation often requires partnership.

Advice to SMEs

When it comes to financing, co-founder, also doubling up as operations manager Ayusa Ondieki, is frank that nothing comes off fully formed and SMEs trying to scale up have to start from somewhere.

SMEs can leverage loans, start banking with financial institutions to increase chances of securing loans for capital, and even raise money from family and friends.

"It's not a one-off thing, it takes time to build a company, and even longer to start seeing profits like for us it took six years," says Ondieki, emphasizing that SMEs should knock on all doors.

Looking into the future, Seven Twenty's strategy is anchored on AI automation, customer service, embracing technology and most importantly expanding its operations beyond the country while also eyeing being on the Nairobi Stock Exchange.



Driving Small and Medium Enterprises Through Sustainability.

There has been an upsurge in the uptake of shared working spaces over the past few years driving the growth of small and micro businesses in Kenya and the greater East African region.

One such organisation at the forefront of this growth is Somo Africa. The non-profit organisation founded back in 2017 is a hub where manufacturing stakeholders come together to learn from each other to drive up their businesses.

The organisation's mission is to support sustainable growth and job creation for micro and small businesses in marginalized communities in East Africa by providing resources, knowledge, financing, and markets to diverse entrepreneurs in both rural and urban areas.

According to the NMCS 2025 Africa Co-Working Space Market report, shared work environments offer flexibility in lease terms and space requirements, appealing particularly to startups and small enterprises seeking to avoid the upfront costs associated with traditional offices.

The communal atmosphere encourages networking and collaboration among professionals from diverse fields, fostering innovation and creativity.

"Equipped with modern amenities and strategically located, co-working spaces provide cost-effective, scalable, and accessible alternatives for companies seeking a central presence without the constraints of long-term leases. The industry has experienced significant growth as businesses recognize the benefits of this model, embracing the collaborative opportunities and resource-sharing inherent in co-working spaces," the report stated.

Small and micro enterprises are the backbone of Kenya's industrial economy contributing nearly 40% of the country's economy and employing up to 14.9 million people. Yet despite their importance, many are operating under intense pressure that threatens their survival.





According to industry experts, access to affordable finance remains one of the most persistent barriers. Many small manufacturers struggle to secure loans due to limited collateral and high interest rates, making it difficult to invest in machinery, technology, or expansion.

This is among one of the challenges Somo Africa has been working to tackle over the years. Having financed nearly 1000 small and micro businesses across the country, the organisation insists that this is only a fraction of what needs to be done to fully support SMEs—especially those in the manufacturing industry in the country.

“It is very capital intensive for entrepreneurs to set up their business. We established the organisation to cut down startup costs by up to 70%,” Somo Africa Sustainability Manager Temesi Weboko said. “How can we work with county governments to create sustainable support systems for young entrepreneurs instead of just focusing solely on financial support which can only last three months,”

A representative from the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) notes that while policy discussions often focus on large-scale industry, small manufacturers face a very different reality.

“Small and micro manufacturers are highly innovative, but they are constrained by capital, skills, and infrastructure gaps. Without targeted financial products and support mechanisms, many remain trapped in survival mode rather than growth,” the KAM official says.

Beyond costs, skills and technology gaps continue to slow progress. While demand for locally manufactured goods is growing, many enterprises lack access to modern production technologies, digital tools, and trained technicians. This limits their ability to meet quality standards, scale production, or access export markets.

Regulatory complexity further compounds the problem. Many small manufacturers operate informally to avoid licensing and compliance costs, but this informality cuts them off from financing, government procurement opportunities, and structured markets.

Market access is another uphill battle. Locally manufactured products often struggle to compete with cheap imports and counterfeit goods, which continue to flood the market. According to KAM, unfair competition discourages investment in quality and innovation among small producers.

Infrastructure gaps—particularly outside major urban centres—remain a major constraint. Poor roads, unreliable power, and limited shared manufacturing facilities increase operational costs and disrupt production schedules.

At the same time, environmental compliance is emerging as a new challenge. While sustainability standards are becoming increasingly important, many small manufacturers lack the resources to invest in cleaner production methods and waste management systems.

“We provide a space where they can access machinery, certification which facilitates access to markets, technical training to refine your product. Co-shared facilities are capable of growing a small business’s revenue by up to 3 times in a minimum of three months,” Temesi says.

Yet amid these challenges, new approaches are emerging—rooted in shared solutions rather than individual. One such approach is shared production infrastructure.

“Instead of one machine serving one person,” Temesi says “one machine can serve 50 people efficiently.”

This model reduces duplication, lowers energy costs, and frees up capital. Entrepreneurs no longer need to invest heavily in machinery but can rather focus on markets, quality, and growth.

At the centre of this approach is Tengeneza, a shared production facility designed as a one-stop hub for micro-enterprises.

Tengeneza addresses multiple disruptions at once: lack of capital, seasonality, information gaps, and high production costs.

For entrepreneurs at Somo Africa, production costs drop significantly

over time while they gain access to raw materials, packaging, certifications, and technical training—all in one place.

“It’s a hub where you get access to business development, technical training, product development, and information,” Temesi says.

Additionally, through the Azizi project, farmers, agro-processors, traders, and logistics partners are connected on a single platform. Data flows across the ecosystem, enabling better coordination and decision-making.

Beyond infrastructure and systems, entrepreneurs are increasingly focused on value addition, quality, and long-term sustainability.

Young entrepreneurs, particularly in agriculture, are innovating—using apps, data, and urban farming to reduce reliance on imports and make better use of local resources.

There is also a growing embrace of circularity. Entrepreneurs are redesigning packaging, encouraging reuse, and adopting eco-friendly materials.

“We need to change the mindset about production. We are setting up circular production hubs with the mindset that our entrepreneurs are mindful of their impact on the environment,” Temesi says.

As Kenya pushes to expand its manufacturing contribution to GDP, the fate of small and micro manufacturers may well determine whether industrial growth is broad-based—or leaves the smallest players behind.

Disruption is no longer something to endure until normal returns. For Kenya’s small businesses, this is normal.

Information exists, but it is fragmented. Data is available, but difficult to access. Best practices are known, but unevenly shared. This fragmentation trickles down, affecting the entrepreneurs who rely on these systems for guidance and support.

“There’s always room for the people supporting entrepreneurs to be capacity-built. We’re also learning,” Temesi says.

“It is amazing to see how our organisation has grown over time. We are currently selling digital tracking tools to other organisations. We have created tools inhouse based on the feedback we are getting from different stakeholders to improve on efficiency,”

But with shared infrastructure, accessible information, inclusive technology, and coordinated support, survival is no longer the ceiling, and across the country, quietly and persistently, entrepreneurs are proving it.





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Punitive and unpredictable taxes strain Kenyan SMEs, says Plensa CEO

By Jacktone Lawi

Kenyan small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are grappling with unpredictable tax policies that are undermining business planning, raising operating costs and slowing expansion, according to Moses Kamau, Group CEO and founder of engineering firm Plensa Group.

Speaking during an interview, Kamau said frequent changes in tax regimes have become one of the biggest disruptions facing medium-sized businesses, particularly those in capital-intensive sectors such as engineering, manufacturing and environmental services.

"It is not that businesses do not want to pay taxes—we do. The problem is that tax policies keep changing every other day," Kamau said. "You may have a strategic plan, only for new taxes or levies to be introduced midway, completely altering your cost structure."

Founded in 1997 and incorporated in 2001, Plensa Group operates in plant engineering, waste management, boilers and energy solutions, serving industries and major hospitals across Kenya and the region. Like many SMEs, the company sits in a vulnerable space—large enough to be highly visible to tax authorities, yet without the financial buffers enjoyed by multinationals.

Kamau described the current tax environment as "punitive", arguing that compliant businesses are often subjected to increased scrutiny while informal or non-compliant players continue operating with minimal enforcement.

"Those who pay taxes are the ones constantly followed," he said. "That creates a sense of unfairness and discourages growth and formalisation."

According to Kamau, the tax burden goes beyond headline rates to include compliance costs, penalties and administrative complexity, all of which drain time and resources that could otherwise be invested in innovation, skills development and market expansion.

The impact is particularly severe for engineering firms, where projects are long-term and capital-heavy. Unanticipated tax changes can distort pricing, delay procurement and





reduce competitiveness, especially when firms are bidding for large industrial or public-sector contracts.

Plensa has also had to contend with overlapping regulatory requirements, particularly in environmental compliance, which often come with additional tax and fee implications. While stricter standards have helped professionalise the sector and improve environmental outcomes, Kamau said they also increase costs for both technology providers and their customers.

“Compliance is expensive. It forces us to invest heavily in research and development, new technologies and certifications,” he said. “These are necessary investments, but when combined with unstable tax policies, they place SMEs under immense pressure.”

The tax challenge is compounded by limited access to affordable credit, another longstanding obstacle for medium-sized enterprises. Kamau noted that higher operational costs—driven partly by taxation—have forced Plensa to maintain a lean workforce, even as demand for skilled labour continues to grow.

“In a more supportive policy environment, we would employ more people,” he said. “But when payroll taxes and operating costs are high, businesses are forced to scale back.”

Despite these challenges, Plensa has adapted by diversifying its services, manufacturing more components locally and expanding into regional markets across Eastern and Southern Africa. Kamau said this strategy is partly driven by the need to reduce exposure to domestic policy uncertainty.

“We are looking beyond Kenya, not because we don’t believe in the local market, but because the operating environment has become too unpredictable,” he said.

Kamau called on the government to engage SMEs more consistently when designing tax and regulatory policies, warning that without

stability, many businesses risk stagnation or closure.

“SMEs are the backbone of the economy,” he said. “If tax policies were more predictable and less punitive, businesses like ours would grow faster, create more jobs and contribute even more to national revenue.”

As Kenya pushes to expand its industrial base and attract investment, Kamau argues that creating a stable and SME-friendly tax regime may be as critical as any infrastructure or financing initiative.





Where Access Fails, Local Innovation Delivers: The Cold Chain That Saves Lives in Forgotten Clinics

While access to healthcare services by Kenyans in underserved communities continues to be a big hustle, local healthcare facilities are now partnering with innovators in the manufacturing industry to improve service delivery.

The struggle, as per shared experiences, starts with the most basic issues, such as the storage of vaccines among other medical jabs, leading to delayed service delivery and extreme mortalities. This factor comes packed with the issue of regional inequalities despite efforts to achieve equity nationally.

Helping bridge this gap is one innovation in the cold technologies, dubbed 'Drop Access', that largely deals with the manufacture of mobile refrigerators, ideal for the delivery and storage of highly temperature-sensitive doses in both underserved and well-served regions, not only in Kenya but regionally.

Founded around 2020- during the COVID-19 period, the Kenyan startup, through its 'Dropbox' product, has been able to store, issue, and transport over 2.5 million doses of medical products, including vaccines, antibiotics, lactose transfusions, insulin, and hormones like oxytocin, with its biggest performing medical product being antibiotics.

According to Norah Magero, the Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder of the innovation startup, this journey, although having an engineering background, was triggered by her experience in a local healthcare facility in Makueni County.

"For a very long time, I lived in Makueni, where I come from, and I had my firstborn child while I was there. I faced gaps or issues trying to get vaccinated. It used to bother me how easy it is to get access to these necessities, but hard in places such as Makueni," She highlights.

"It made me realize what inequality actually means. With Inequality, you don't have to go all the way to Turkana; it happens three hours away from Nairobi, and sometimes even one hour away, it doesn't make sense."

Her experience as the energy and maintenance engineer at a local healthcare facility in Makueni County exposed her to faulty storage systems, which in turn affected the supply of special medicines in the community.

"While I was living in Makueni, I worked in a hospital where I used to be the energy and maintenance engineer there and I was always in charge of the vaccine refrigerator. It used to be a gas refrigerator, then it was converted to electricity. That thing was so bad," she highlights.

Magero explains that the refrigerator, in many instances, formed a block of ice on the stored medical products, meaning that the patients would not be able to access them on the go, a factor that came with its own implications.

"From my work perspective, we needed it to ensure that the vaccine could actually be kept cold, but now this fridge would actually form like a block of ice, and it didn't make sense," she explains, highlighting that the major factor is the cost of acquiring vaccine refrigerators, which are also not always available.

Now through her venture, she is optimistic about rewriting the experiences in different setups as she is currently collaborating with both the public and the private sectors in line with sustainability goals.

Her innovations have been able to support counties such as Kajiado, Makueni, Bungoma, Homabay, Laikipia, Isiolo, and even Turkana.

"I think the biggest milestone for us here at Drop Access is the fact that we've been able to conduct Research and Development (R&D) and cross over to generating revenues with a solution that is still in an R&D group," she shares.



"So, developing a solution like the one we do over here, the locally manufactured box refrigerator, developing that solution all the way from ideas, when we conceive that idea to economic viability, that might take around 10 years, we're able to do that within six years."

At present, the Vaccine Box refugee data has enabled clinics, healthcare facilities, both in the public and private spaces, to be able to ensure that vaccines are at the healthcare facility when it's needed. Blood for transfusion is available for transportation, taken from one place to the other, when it's needed to save a life.

Just like many other ventures in the country, Drop Access also struggles with government policies, which, according to Magero, are impeding local manufacturers, impacting the costs of local manufacture of the equipment amid poor medical funding and a tougher business environment.

"We as Kenyans have the solutions to our own problems. If the government can collaborate with local manufacturers, re-examine the importation cost for raw materials, or incentivize them, then we can be able to achieve a lot more as a country," she points out.

As a female founder, she highlights, issues of gender disparities are still more pronounced, which deprives women of equal opportunities.

"As a woman founder, it's harder for me to raise financing because of perceptions. If you look at the funding ecosystem, most of the people in funding committees are men. Men trust men. That is the truth. So, it's easier to fund a man who is running a manufacturing firm because it's easier to trust that a man knows what he's doing, and I've seen that perception," she explains, calling for inclusivity.



Too much tax, unpredictable levies driving youth away from manufacturing – Xpert Adhesives

Excessive taxation, unpredictable levies and rising compliance costs are pushing young entrepreneurs away from manufacturing and into trading and service-based businesses, a Kenyan adhesives manufacturer has warned.

Darshal Wadhia, Chief Executive Officer of Xpert Adhesives Kenya Limited, said the current tax and regulatory environment has made manufacturing unattractive to youth, despite government commitments to grow the sector's contribution to GDP.

"You will hardly find a young Kenyan aged between 20 and 25 saying they want to get into manufacturing today," Wadhia said in an interview.

"Too much taxation, sudden duty changes and unpredictable regulatory costs have made manufacturing a high-risk, low-reward venture for young people."

Xpert Adhesives Kenya, founded by Sharad Wadhia and now led by Darshal Wadhia, manufactures industrial and construction adhesives under brands such as Boswhite.

The company has expanded from a single product to a portfolio that includes industrial adhesives, construction sealants and fillers, while gradually reducing reliance on imports.

However, Wadhia said frequent tax changes on key raw materials, including petrochemicals and white cement, have disrupted planning and increased costs overnight, forcing manufacturers to focus on survival rather than innovation.

"Duties and levies change without warning. Electricity costs keep rising. New compliance fees come from different agencies. This unpredictability scares away young entrepreneurs who would otherwise invest in factories, machinery and skills," he said.

According to Wadhia, the impact is visible across the sector. While Kenya imports over 6,000 tonnes of adhesive-related products annually, local manufacturers are struggling to expand capacity, even as regional demand grows under trade blocs such as the EAC, COMESA and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).



He noted that while exports have improved to about 3,200 tonnes, local producers still face stiff competition from under-invoiced imports, particularly from Asia, which undercut locally made products on price.

Beyond taxation, Wadhia cited cartel-like control of raw material supply, limited access to affordable credit, delayed payments by construction firms and slow judicial processes as additional pressures on manufacturing SMEs.

"When manufacturers are forced to import raw materials with cash, but sell finished products on long credit terms, cash flow collapses. If a client defaults, court cases take years. Young people see this and choose trading instead," he said.

Wadhia contrasted Kenya's environment with Rwanda, where his company is setting up a new manufacturing plant. He said tax incentives, export rebates and streamlined registration processes in Rwanda have made manufacturing more attractive and predictable.

"In Rwanda, policies encourage young people to produce, not just trade. That's why manufacturers are expanding there," he said.

He urged policymakers to rethink tax and industrial policies if the country is to achieve its target of growing manufacturing to 20 per cent of GDP.

"Manufacturing cannot grow through pressure alone. Youth need predictable taxes, fair competition, subsidies or grants, and protection from monopolies," Wadhia said. "If policies don't change, we will keep losing young talent to trading and imports."

Wadhia called on the government to involve SMEs in policy formulation, strengthen enforcement against under-invoicing, and reform the judicial system to protect smaller manufacturers.

"SMEs are the backbone of the economy. If we create the right environment, youth will return to manufacturing. If not, Kenya risks becoming a market for imports rather than a producer," he said.

Darshal Wadhia, CEO, Xpert Adhesives Kenya Limited



Celebrating 75 Years of Service, Resilience, and Quality

Kenya Meat Commission (KMC) marks a significant milestone as it celebrates 75 years since its establishment in 1950. Over the past three quarters of a century, KMC has played a pivotal role in shaping Kenya's livestock and meat sector — from being the nation's principal meat processor to a critical component of the livestock economy. KMC was formed by an Act of Parliament in 1950 with a clear mandate: to provide a ready market for livestock producers and to ensure the consistent supply of quality meat products to Kenyan consumers and export markets. From its inception, the Commission sought to procure livestock, operate abattoirs and processing facilities, enforce quality assurance standards, and add value through meat processing and by-products.

KMC enjoys a reputation as one of the region's most advanced meat processors, boasting significant slaughtering capacity with an installed slaughter capacity of 1000 cattle and 1500 goats and sheep per day in Athi River and 300 cattle and 1500 sheep and goats in Kibarani. The commission engages various professionals in the day-to-day running of its operations including; engineers, veterinary surgeons, food scientists, public health specialists, procurement officers, quality assurance officers, finance and human resource managers, giving it an institutional strength with a brand of international status. This era of success underscored KMC's role as a backbone of the livestock value chain, from quality assurance at slaughter to export compliance which has helped establish it as a reputable supplier of beef in regional and international markets.

Over 75 years, KMC has touched the lives of countless livestock producers across Kenya. By offering a structured procurement framework, the Commission has helped stabilize livestock markets, incentivized herd growth, and anchored a critical segment of the agricultural value chain. While external challenges have persisted, including competition from informal markets and regional rivals,

KMC's market presence remains indispensable to many farmers who depend on institutional buyers for their livestock during normal and drought seasons. Moreover, the Commission has created employment opportunities directly within its operations and indirectly through market linkages along the red meat value chain leading to growth of local economies, particularly in rural areas where livestock keeping is a primary source of livelihood.

The 75 years also marks a story of resilience. KMC has undergone operational renewal and strategic transformation which has led to the revitalization of the Commission and restoration of investor and stakeholder confidence. The Commission in the past 5 years has seen tremendous growth in its market share through the opening of various franchises and own "Nyama Haven" outlets in the Nairobi and Mombasa metropolis. This deliberate strategy of decentralization of KMC operations to strengthen KMC's footprints beyond Athi River has expanded the Commission's outreach making quality meat products more accessible to Kenyans across the country while creating jobs and stimulating local economic activity, a clear demonstration of its evolving business strategy. These efforts signal KMC's commitment to not only supply quality meat products but also to support farmers by ensuring consistent market access and fair pricing mechanisms.

The Commission has also been a key partner in promoting the Kenyan meat industry, the Commission has received several awards and recognitions for participating in various events or programs in the agricultural sector aimed at promoting quality, safety standards, value addition and food security in the meat industry. It has also played a key role in building human capital in the meat sector by supporting various training institutions by offering attachments, internship and training opportunities in the meat processing industry. The Commission has over the years been the source of well-trained personnel supporting the meat industry across the country in various capacities.

75 Years of Quality, Trust & Impact in the Meat Industry

Congratulations to Kenya Meat Commission on marking 75 years of excellence!

For decades, KMC has been at the heart of advancing national food security, creating livelihoods, and driving sustainable growth in the livestock and meat industry. By championing quality production, efficient systems, and environmentally friendly practices, KMC has not only built a proud national legacy but also earned trust across global markets.

As your partner, we celebrate this remarkable milestone and honour your enduring impact on farmers, communities, and the economy at large.

**Here's to 75 years of resilience and progress —
and to a future of greater possibilities together.**

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Today, the Commission is actively leveraging newer engagement channels to connect with consumers and stakeholders. Through various social media platforms, the Commission showcases its new products lines and food safety compliance and in so doing reinforcing its brand relevance in a competitive market. This is critical for the long-term sustainability of KMC's brand performance

As KMC commemorates this important anniversary, stakeholders are keenly aware that the journey ahead will require continued adaptation to various challenges which include climate change and red meat market dynamics, the need to modernize its facilities, compliance with the ever-changing international export standards, investment in quality assurance, research, and stronger collaboration with farmers and strategic partners. The anniversary serves not only as a moment of celebration but also as a recommitment to the founding mission: to support livestock producers, ensure quality meat supply, and contribute meaningfully to Kenya's food security and economic growth.

In conclusion, the 75-year journey of the Kenya Meat Commission is a compelling story of aspiration, resilience, and renewal. From its formative years as the nation's premier meat processor to its ongoing renaissance marked by strategic expansion and modern governance as a government owned enterprise, KMC stands tall as an institution

deeply woven into the tapestry of Kenya's agricultural economy. As it looks to the future, the Commission's legacy underscores the importance of innovation, sound management, and stakeholder engagement, elements that will define its relevance and contribution in the decades to come.





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We extend our heartfelt congratulations to Kenya Meat Commission on the occasion of your 75th Anniversary. This milestone is a true testament to your dedication, leadership, and impact in the meat industry over the years. Your commitment to excellence continues to inspire and support the entire value chain.

We celebrate this achievement with you and look forward to continued partnership in the years ahead.



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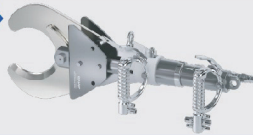


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African Originals Gin Brand gains B Corp Status



Unlike South Africa, which has for the longest time been a hotbed of craft beer and gin innovations in Africa, Kenya is still struggling to meet the demand for variety of high quality, locally crafted and affordable alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

This is the gap that Alexandra Chappatte, a British -Belgian entrepreneur and her husband were seeking to bridge, when they established African Originals in 2018, which has since been defined as a leading craft Gin, ciders and tonics brewer in Kenya.

Alexandra Chappatte, the Founder and CEO of African Originals explained to Industry Today, that African Original (AO) brews a real taste of Kenyan craft ciders, spirits, tonics and iced-teas, using real Kenyan ingredients and without artificial sweeteners or flavours, for Kenyans and international consumers.

These ingredients include the Apple mangoes, pink peppercorn, Hibiscus flowers, raw purple passion fruit, bitter oranges, bird eye chilies, pineapple, lemon, ginger, wild honey and a variety of herbs from across the country.

"When I moved to Ghana in 2015, and started working as a Marketer for Pernod Ricard, overseeing global brands like Jameson, Vodka, Chivas Regal and Absolut, I was struck by the huge unmet demand for locally brewed beverages in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In West Africa, I saw a lot of imported low-end expensive products and a lot of low-end mass market local products, especially in Kenya, that were not being used, and I thought I could grab this opportunity to create quality craft products for the African consumers". Alexandra explains.

Alex, as her colleagues call her, reveals to Industry Today, That the secret

to growth, expansion and profitability of AO is constant innovation.

“My past experience working in confectionery – Nestle, chocolates, sweets and being directly involved in innovation strategies, has shaped my value for constant innovation. Sweets and chocolates are fast-moving consumer goods that require constant innovation” she said.

She further explains that Innovation at African Originals is a very collaborative process that involves a lot of cross-functional consultations, before, during and after any product innovation.

“We already have created examples of innovations, so the team knows what good innovations look like. A thought for product innovation could be started by the distiller, or someone in marketing or me”

2024 was a significant growth year for African Originals. The company introduced their premium Mara Edition Gin, which draws inspiration from the vibrant Maasai culture and which is available in High-end retailers and bars at Ksh 8,500

AO reported 80million unit sales, reached out to about 45,000 Kenyan consumers, through about 4000 bars and supermarkets.

What started as a small business operation, in a shipping container, somewhere in Kiambu county, before moving to a 28,000 square

foot go-down facility in Nairobi's Babadogo area, has become a multi-million venture, posting an upward shift or increase of between \$3 to \$4 million in profits since 2022, while employing close to 100 people.

African Originals' expansion to the United Kingdom and Uganda in 2024 and 2025, means that the craft brewer is now exporting indigenous taste of Kenya's diverse landscape to these countries and beyond.

AO is keen on giving Kenyans a real taste of their country's beauty and uniqueness while giving back to the society, something that saw the company securing a B-Corp certification in early 2025.

The company came out with an overall B impact score of 89.9, which is way above the median score for ordinary businesses who complete the assessment, hence becoming the 81st African B-Corp, the only Gin and cider B-Corp in Africa and the second B-Corp in Kenya.

“We are proud to be recognized as a B-Corp in the world and in Kenya. B-Corp certification is well established in some international markets like the UK, but still quite young here in Kenya and this is one of the reasons why it is quite difficult to secure one here”

“African Originals is very lucky to have some incredibly diligent

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people in the team, who made this possible. What this means for us and our stakeholders is that, it is possible to operate authentic alcohol business in a transparent manner, that shows a wider sense of responsibility and sustainability”

Alexandra encourages business to attempt B-Corp certification noting that “A lot of these accreditations are just a way of motivating companies to do better or level up”.

The nine-month B-Corp evaluation process left African Originals group motivated to do better in environmental sustainability, women empowerment at work place and smallholder farmer or partners’ support.

Alexandra explains that African Originals is known for uplifting the status of women and youth .56 % of the company’s employees are women. AO is also actively and intentionally ensuring employees are heard and seen through celebrating and rewarding their success.

“I don’t think we can ever perfect this, but there’s definitely a lot going on at AO about these. Our key values are Originality, Collaboration, Accountability and Resilience, so every month, the team comes together for insider choma chat awards, where employees get to vote the best team members who demonstrate, these values, and there is a functional reward for that” she says, explaining that, this also helps drive organization’s key values

“I am female who is passionate about women in business. I think Kenya has one of the highest numbers of single mothers across the globe and I like to see them empowered at work places, creating

job opportunities for women is not enough, we need to add creating leadership positions for them to that, to make it more effective. We have, for instance employed our first female engineer in our production process”

“We are already impacting farmers. They supply real fruit to AO and they grow their income. We work with the Maasai community, especially the women who help us to bead our bottle-tops, we have directly employed about 30 Maasai community members, who help us to forge the herbs we use in our beverages. We also partnered with them to launch our Mara Edition Gin which came with financial benefits and lessons for them. But there is always room for improvement. I think our future plans involves creating better relationships with them, educating them more and things like that”

B-Corp is not the only international acclaim for African Originals. In 2024, the Kenyan craft brewer walked away with Brand innovator of the year award, at the world Gin awards in London.

“It is very exciting to have an international award or win it on international markets. What stood out for the organizers was our Kenyan Originals (KO) Klub limited Edition Gin series and the Mara Gin” says Alexandra.

Moving forward, consumers should look forward to new drink innovations, with very specialized premium ingredients like Mott and Mulberry. African Originals planning to expand their outlets in Kenya and increase exports, in a bid to unlock new revenue streams for stakeholders.



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Konza Technopolis: Shaping the Next Chapter of Kenya's Industrial Future

By John Paul Okwiri, CEO, Konza Technopolis

Across Kenya, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are doing the hardest work in the economy. They manufacture, distribute, assemble, supply, and employ. They keep markets moving and supply chains alive. Yet when you speak to MSME owners, especially those trying to move from survival into scale, the same frustrations surface repeatedly.

Growth is expensive. Infrastructure is unreliable. Energy costs are high. Logistics are fragmented. Compliance is confusing. Access to export markets feels distant, even when demand exists. Many businesses are capable of producing more, better, and faster, but the environment around them makes that difficult.

This is not a Kenyan problem alone. Globally, MSMEs face a common challenge: they are expected to compete in international markets while operating in systems designed either for informal survival or for large corporations. There is very little in between. As a result, many promising businesses stall, not because of lack of ambition or capability, but because the ecosystem does not support the next step.

Around the world, countries that have successfully grown their MSMEs into global contributors have done one thing deliberately:

they have built spaces where small businesses can operate as if they were larger, without carrying the full cost of scale on their own. This is why special economic zones exist. Not as tax shelters, but as pressure-relief environments: places where infrastructure, regulation, logistics, and technology are deliberately aligned to reduce friction.

Kenya's attempt to do this at a national scale is taking shape in Konza Technopolis.

For many MSMEs, the first barrier to growth is physical. Manufacturing space is limited, poorly serviced, or located far from reliable transport links. Power interruptions disrupt production. Water shortages increase costs. Internet connectivity is inconsistent. Each of these issues may seem manageable on its own, but together they make consistency almost impossible, especially for businesses trying to meet regional or global standards.

Konza's design addresses this first layer of constraint by concentrating infrastructure in one place. Reliable power, modern transport connections, digital connectivity, and integrated logistics are not add-ons; they are the baseline. For MSMEs, this shifts the conversation from "how do we cope?" to "how do we plan?"





*John Paul Okwiri, CEO,
Konza Technopolis*

The second challenge is formality without flexibility. Many MSMEs want to formalize further: to access financing, export markets, and larger contracts, but fear the bureaucracy and cost that often comes with it. Special economic and export processing zones are meant to lower that barrier. Konza's dual SEZ and EPZ designation matters here, not because of incentives alone, but because it creates a clearer path into structured production and trade.

For a small manufacturer, duty-free access to inputs, simplified customs processes, and predictable regulatory frameworks can be the difference between exporting once and exporting consistently. This is how cities like Shenzhen transformed small suppliers into global manufacturers: not overnight, but through systems that allowed learning, upgrading, and scaling within the same environment.

Another pain point MSMEs face is isolation. Many operate without access to research, technical expertise, or innovation support. Product development happens through trial and error. Skills gaps slow growth. Global competitors, meanwhile, are plugged into research institutions, testing facilities, and continuous improvement systems.

Konza attempts to close this gap by physically and institutionally linking industry with universities and research centres. This matters for MSMEs because innovation does not always mean invention; often it means better processes, improved quality, or compliance with new standards. When knowledge is closer to production, upgrading becomes possible.

Sustainability is another emerging pressure point. Global markets are increasingly asking not just what is produced, but how it is produced. For many MSMEs, meeting environmental and energy standards feels out of reach. Yet ignoring them risks exclusion from future markets. By embedding renewable energy and green infrastructure into the city's design, Konza reduces the individual burden on businesses. This follows global examples such as Masdar City, where sustainability is treated as shared infrastructure rather than a private cost.

None of this automatically guarantees MSME success. Infrastructure alone does not create competitiveness. What matters is whether MSMEs can actually access these systems, afford them, and operate within them without being crowded out by larger players. This is where policy, pricing, governance, and deliberate inclusion become critical.

For Konza to truly serve MSMEs, continued attention must be paid to entry thresholds, tenancy models, financing linkages, and capacity-building support. Plug-and-play only works if "plugging in" is realistic for small businesses. Global cities like Bangalore succeeded not because they were perfect, but because they allowed small firms to grow alongside larger ones, learning and scaling within the same ecosystem.

Seen this way, Konza is not the story, it is part of the response to a much larger one. Kenya's MSMEs are already fuelling economic growth. What they need now are environments that reduce friction, reward consistency, and make scale achievable.

If Konza succeeds, it will not be because of its buildings or branding. It will be because MSMEs inside it are producing more reliably, exporting more confidently, and moving further up value chains than they could before.

That is what 'building stronger' looks like in practice: not replacing MSMEs, but finally building systems that work for them.

The writer is the CEO, Konza Technopolis and can be reached via; invest@konza.go.ke

How Kenyan MSMEs are using Digital Systems to Grow with Confidence

By Daniel Abok

Across Kenya, MSMEs are not only participants in the economy, they are also the economy. They open the shops, move the goods, employ the people, and keep local supply chains alive. From wholesalers and retailers to manufacturers and service providers, MSMEs quietly power most day-to-day business activity in the country. Their impact is visible in markets, industrial areas, estates, and town centers, even if it rarely makes headlines.

Yet for a long time, many MSMEs have been doing this work under strain. Businesses have grown in volume, but not in structure. Records have been kept manually. Stock has been tracked in notebooks. Sales have been logged in spreadsheets that only one person understands. Payments have arrived through different channels and been reconciled late at night, or sometimes not at all. Important decisions have been made based on experience and instinct; not because owners lack discipline, but because the right systems were missing.

For years, MSME owners have known what needs to be done to grow, but growth without systems is exhausting. As customer numbers increase, inventory becomes harder to manage. As suppliers multiply, cash flow becomes harder to predict. As teams expand, accountability becomes harder to maintain. Growth, instead of feeling like progress, begins to feel risky.

That reality is now changing.

Digital transformation is no longer something reserved for large corporations with large IT budgets. Kenyan MSMEs are increasingly adopting simple, connected digital systems that help them see what is happening in their businesses and respond with clarity. At the centre of this shift are practical Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems combined with integrated digital payments, tools designed to support MSMEs in their daily operations, not complicate them.

For small and medium businesses, growth often exposes weaknesses long before it delivers rewards. Errors creep in quietly. Stock discrepancies increase. Invoices are delayed.

Payments become harder to trace. Owners spend more time fixing problems than planning the next step. Without connected systems, even well-run businesses struggle to keep pace with their own growth.

This is where ERP systems designed specifically for MSMEs become valuable.

Unlike traditional enterprise software, which was built for large organizations with complex hierarchies, modern Kenyan-developed platforms focus on simplicity, affordability, and relevance. Solutions like Kidaftari ERP are not trying to turn MSMEs into something they are not. They are built to support the realities MSMEs face every day.

When inventory, sales, suppliers, customers, and finances are managed in one place, business owners gain clarity. They can see what is selling, what is slow-moving, what is owed, and what is available, without relying on guesswork. That visibility reduces losses, improves planning, and restores confidence. It allows MSMEs to move from reacting to issues to making informed decisions.

Payments are a critical part of this shift. For many MSMEs, managing payments has always been one of the most stressful aspects of running a business. Mobile money, bank transfers, cash, invoices, and credit often sit in separate records. Reconciling them manually takes time and creates room for error. When payments are disconnected from operations, even profitable businesses struggle to understand their true position.

Integrated digital payment systems simplify this process. When payments are linked directly to business records, invoices are tracked automatically, receipts are generated instantly, and cash flow becomes visible in real time. This strengthens financial discipline, improves transparency, and creates reliable records: an essential requirement for accessing credit, building supplier trust, and preparing for scale.

With practical ERP solutions like Kidaftari ERP and integrated digital payments, small businesses are gaining clarity, accountability, and time.



Just as importantly, these systems give MSME owners something they rarely have enough of: time. Time to focus on customers instead of paperwork. Time to supervise teams instead of chasing figures. Time to improve products, strengthen relationships, and think about expansion. Digital systems do not remove the human element from business; they protect it by reducing unnecessary pressure.

At its core, this shift is not about technology as a trend. It is about support. ERP and integrated payment platforms serve MSMEs by making their work easier, their businesses more organized, and their growth more manageable. They create accountability across teams, reduce dependence on one individual's memory, and allow businesses to operate consistently even when the owner is not present.

As Kenya continues to strengthen its digital economy, MSMEs must remain central to that journey. When small businesses are equipped with tools that match their scale and pace, they become more resilient, more transparent, and better prepared for growth. They strengthen local supply chains, improve service delivery, and contribute more reliably to national economic performance.

MSMEs are already doing the hard work. Digital systems like ERP and integrated payments are simply supporting them to do that work better, with greater clarity and confidence.

That is how stronger businesses are built. That is how growth becomes sustainable. And that is how MSMEs continue to power Kenya's economy.

The writer is the CEO, Kidaftari ERP.



Kidaftari ERP is proud to collaborate with Kings Mabati in driving digital transformation and operational excellence within Kenya's manufacturing sector.

The Heart of Growth: How MSMEs Strengthen Kenya's Economy from the Inside Out

By: Imran Shamsher



When I first saw the call for articles themed “Building Stronger: How MSMEs Are Fueling Growth,” my first instinct was doubt. We have all heard about the statistics. We know the percentages. We know how often MSMEs are described as the backbone of the economy. I honestly wondered what more there was to add.

So I did what many of us do. I read the reports. I scanned the data. I revisited the research papers and policy documents. Everything was accurate, well-argued, and technically sound.

And yet, something essential was missing.

None of it reflected what I have seen over nearly two decades of working alongside MSMEs.

The numbers talk about contributions to GDP and employment figures. What they do not show is the human effort that keeps these businesses alive. They do not show the early mornings, the personal risk, or the quiet determination behind every open shop door. They do not show the people, behind the business.

That is where the real story begins.

MSMEs grow Kenya's economy from the inside out because they are built on heart. This is not only a sentimental idea, but a practical one. Large organizations operate through systems: processes, approvals, Key Performing Indices (KPIs) and dashboards. That structure is necessary for scale. But it also creates distance. Decisions become transactional. Relationships are managed, not lived.

In MSMEs, the business and the person are inseparable.

A small shop is more than a point of sale. It pays school fees. It sustains dignity. It carries the hope that tomorrow might be better than today. For many founders, it is a single chance to change the direction of a family's future. That is why every customer matters. Every slow day matters. Every good day matters. Every shilling matters.

This emotional investment creates a different kind of economic energy. It shows up in resilience: the ability to keep going when conditions are tough and margins are thin. It shows up in innovation that comes from necessity, not abundance. It shows up in loyalty, because customers are known, remembered, and welcomed. And it shows up in communities that are quietly supported, day after day, without recognition.

This reality became very clear to me recently during one of my regular field visits in the CBD with a major wholesale partner. As we approached one of the shops, the atmosphere was immediately noticeable. Before I had even said a word, the owner, a second-generation entrepreneur, looked up from the counter, smiled broadly, and greeted me warmly.



Inside, customers were engaged in easy conversation with the sales staff. Products were moving. Money was moving. There was laughter, familiarity, and comfort. Nothing about the space felt pressured or defeated. It felt alive.

These moments stay with you because they reveal what MSMEs really are.

This heart has very real economic consequences. Trust, for example, is a form of capital in the MSME world. A handshake still carries meaning. Goods change hands on the strength of relationships. Credit is extended because people know each other. This trust keeps trade moving even when formal systems are slow or inaccessible.

Innovation is another outcome. When resources are limited, creativity becomes essential. MSMEs test ideas quickly, adapt products, and respond to customer needs without layers of bureaucracy. Many of the product innovations we have seen over the years were born out of constraint, not comfort.

Resilience follows naturally. Many MSMEs are family businesses, built to last beyond one generation. The motivation is not just profit; it is continuity. That long-term thinking stabilizes households and protects livelihoods.

And then there is community. From the local mama mboga to mid-sized wholesalers, MSMEs support entire networks of families. Money circulates locally, strengthening neighbourhoods

and sustaining ecosystems that collectively hold the national economy together.

This is what growing the economy from the inside out looks like.

If Kenya wants an industrial future that is strong, inclusive, and sustainable, we must preserve what makes MSMEs work in the first place. That means easing unnecessary bureaucracy that drains small businesses. It means improving access to affordable financing. It means investing in mentorship, skills, and real capacity-building. And it means recognizing MSMEs as legitimate economic actors, not informal afterthoughts.

The strength of Kenya's economy does not start in boardrooms or policy papers. It starts in shops, stalls, workshops, and warehouses: where people show up every day and build, one decision at a time.

MSMEs grow this economy from the inside out because they are built from the inside out. From people. From families. From heart. And that is what keeps Kenya moving forward; steadily, and together.

The writer is the CEO, Jubilee Tissue Industries.



Skilling MSMEs in Manufacturing: The Growth Engine Kenya Cannot Ignore

By Francis Veto



By investing in people, Kenya can unlock the full potential of its manufacturing sector and turn policy ambitions into lived economic reality.

Manufacturing has always played a quiet but decisive role in Kenya's economy. It is where ideas are turned into products, where jobs are created beyond the classroom, and where local supply chains come alive. Yet despite its importance, the sector still contributes a relatively modest share to GDP, even as micro, small, and medium enterprises make up most businesses and employers across the country. Within manufacturing, MSMEs are not peripheral players; they are the system itself. They produce, assemble, process, repair, and supply. They keep factories running and markets stocked.

As Kenya pushes toward its ambition of expanding manufacturing's contribution to economic growth, the conversation often leans heavily toward infrastructure, incentives, and industrial zones. These are important, but they are not enough on their own. Growth does not happen inside buildings or policies. It happens through people. The true strength of manufacturing MSMEs lies in skills: practical, adaptable, job-ready skills that turn effort into productivity and ambition into scale.

For many MSMEs, skills are the difference between survival and growth. A trained worker reduces waste, improves consistency, and delivers quality that meets market standards. In a sector where margins are tight and competition is intense, even small gains in efficiency matter. Skilled teams work faster, make fewer errors, and adapt more easily when new processes or equipment are introduced. Over time, this compounds into stronger businesses that can take on larger orders, meet compliance requirements, and integrate into formal value chains.

Kenya's manufacturing MSMEs are full of talent, but much of it remains informal or underutilised. Many workers learn on the job, mastering machines, tools, and production processes through experience rather than formal education. This is where technical and vocational education and training becomes central to building stronger enterprises. TVET bridges the gap between informal know-how and structured growth. It gives MSMEs a way to strengthen what already exists, rather than starting from scratch.

Training models that combine learning with real work have proven particularly effective for smaller manufacturers. Dual training allows employees to build skills while remaining productive, ensuring that learning is grounded in actual production needs. For MSMEs, this approach avoids long disruptions and keeps costs manageable. Workers gain confidence and competence, while enterprises benefit from improved output almost immediately. When supported by accessible training funds and simplified processes, this model becomes not just educational, but economically strategic.

Equally important is recognising the value of experience. Many MSME workers carry years of practical expertise without formal credentials. Recognition of Prior Learning offers a pathway to validate those skills, bringing visibility and legitimacy to work that has long gone undocumented. For enterprises, this strengthens compliance, improves credibility with clients and partners, and boosts employee retention. For workers, it creates pride, motivation, and opportunities for further growth. What was once hidden capacity becomes a measurable business advantage.

As manufacturing evolves, technology is becoming part of everyday operations, even for smaller enterprises. Digital inventory systems, basic automation, and design tools are no longer reserved for large factories. But technology alone does not transform businesses. Skills do. Without trained operators and digitally literate managers, tools remain underused or misused. MSMEs that invest in skills alongside technology unlock real value, better planning, reduced downtime, improved quality, and data-informed decisions. Skills ensure that technology serves growth, rather than complicating it.

Beyond technical capability, human capital extends into life skills that shape how businesses function day to day. Communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and financial literacy influence productivity as much as machinery does. MSME owners who

understand cash flow and planning make stronger strategic choices. Workers who communicate effectively reduce errors and delays. These skills create workplaces that are adaptable, collaborative, and resilient: qualities that matter deeply in a changing economy.

This is how MSMEs build strength from the inside out: by investing in people who can learn, adapt, and improve continuously. TVET is not a parallel system to enterprise growth; it is embedded within it. When aligned with real industry needs and supported by practical policy tools, it becomes a catalyst for scale rather than a cost.

As this edition of Industry Today explores, MSMEs are not simply participants in economic growth, they are its engine. In manufacturing, their success depends on how well skills development is integrated into everyday operations. Strengthening MSMEs means strengthening the workforce behind them. And when skills, experience, and opportunity come together, growth stops being a policy goal and starts becoming a lived reality across Kenya's industrial landscape.

The writer is the TVET Project Manager at KAM



MSMEs are the engine of Kenya's industrial growth.

- Investing in people through TVET, recognition of experience, and life skills creates enterprises that scale sustainably.
- Growth shifts from being a policy aspiration to a lived reality when skills, experience, and opportunity converge.

Women in Manufacturing-Positioned for Global Service

By Peris Mbutia

Women have always been present in manufacturing, even when their work went unnoticed. What is changing today is not their involvement, but their positioning. Across Kenya, women-led manufacturing businesses are increasingly moving beyond survival and local relevance to think deliberately about standards, scale, and access to regional and global markets.

In Kenya and globally, women form a significant part of the manufacturing workforce, with estimates placing their

participation at just under a third of the sector. Locally, their presence is strongest within micro, small, and medium enterprises, where production decisions are closely tied to market realities. These businesses may be small in size, but they are often highly adaptive; an essential quality for export readiness.

Women-led manufacturing companies are particularly visible in sectors that lend themselves well to regional and international trade. Health and personal care products, cosmetics, textiles and apparel, nutrition, and hospitality supplies dominate this space. These sectors require consistency, quality control, regulatory awareness, and a deep understanding of consumer expectations, areas where women-led enterprises have demonstrated strong capability.

What stands out is how these businesses approach product development. Many women manufacturers build for markets they understand personally. This closeness to the end user results in products that are practical, compliant, and responsive. As a result, when these businesses prepare for export, whether into East Africa, the wider African market, or beyond, they often require less adjustment than expected. The fundamentals are already in place.

That said, moving from local manufacturing to regional or global service is not a straightforward journey.

Women manufacturers continue to face barriers that slow down or limit their export potential. Access to affordable financing remains one of the most persistent challenges. Export readiness requires investment in machinery, certifications, packaging, logistics, and working capital. Yet women-led businesses frequently encounter higher scrutiny when applying for loans or grants, despite strong performance histories.

There is also a significant information gap. Many women manufacturers lack access to timely and practical guidance on export regulations, trade agreements, standards compliance, and market entry requirements. Opportunities for mentorship, global buyer linkages, and exposure to international trade platforms remain unevenly distributed.



Still, progress is visible.

Women are increasingly present in manufacturing sectors once considered out of reach. From construction-related inputs to industrial finishing, women-owned firms are proving that technical competence and operational discipline are not gendered. A notable example is Space and Style, led by Winnie Ngumi, which operates in a competitive manufacturing environment while meeting the quality and delivery expectations of large-scale clients.

Within established manufacturing firms such as Bedi Investments Limited, women occupy both junior and senior roles, contributing directly to production management, quality assurance, compliance, and operational leadership. These roles are critical for export-facing businesses, where consistency and reliability determine market access and reputation.

Globally, women-led manufacturing innovations provide useful reference points for what export-oriented thinking looks like in practice. Sara Blakely built a globally recognized apparel manufacturing brand by focusing on product function and quality. Jessica O Matthews translated a simple idea into a globally scalable energy solution. Miki Agrawal addressed overlooked consumer needs and built manufacturing systems that met international standards. Closer to home, Vivo Fashion Group, founded by Wandia Gichuru, demonstrates how Kenyan manufacturing can meet global design and quality expectations without losing its identity.

These examples matter because they show what becomes possible when manufacturing is aligned with market knowledge, compliance, and long-term thinking. Export readiness is not only about scale; it is about systems, standards, and credibility.

Women-led manufacturing businesses often excel here. They tend to prioritize quality control, traceability, and customer feedback: elements that are essential for sustaining regional and global trade relationships. They also understand the importance of reputation, knowing that one failed delivery or quality lapse can close doors permanently.

As Kenya positions itself as a manufacturing and export hub, women must be seen as central contributors to this ambition. Their businesses strengthen value chains, improve product reliability, and bring diversity of thought into production systems. More importantly, they grow the economy, by building enterprises that are stable locally and competitive externally.

The next phase of growth requires deliberate support. Simplified access to export financing, clearer trade information, targeted mentorship, and stronger regional linkages will allow more women manufacturers to move confidently into global service.

Women in manufacturing are not waiting to be prepared for global markets. Many are already meeting the standards. What remains is to ensure that the systems around them recognize that reality, and support it.

The writer is the Human Resource Manager at Bedi Investments.



Kenya missing out on USD 5.3 Billion in exports, KAM Study reveals

KAM launches Export Competitiveness Study

Wednesday, 10th December 2025: Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), in partnership with the German Embassy in Nairobi and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ Kenya), today released a new Exports Competitiveness Study. The study findings show that Kenya has been missing out on USD

5.3 billion annually in unmet export potential and nearly USD 10 billion in broader export opportunities that remain unrealised. The report comes at a time when the country continues to grapple with a widening export deficit, despite the availability of regional and global markets ready to absorb more Kenyan products.

Launching the report, Peter Njoroge, Director of External Trade at the State Department for Trade, reaffirmed government commitment to advancing reforms that boost Kenya's competitiveness. He said, "We are strengthening the National Export Strategy to promote value addition and fully access and utilise existing preferential markets. Key reforms include upgrading logistics infrastructure, digitising approvals and trade documentation, enhancing the National Electronic Single Window System, and reducing regulatory overlaps. We

are also expanding MSME financing and promoting value addition across tea, coffee, textiles, edible oils, fisheries and livestock," he said.

Building on this, Miriam Bomett, Head of Policy and Regulatory Advocacy at KAM, emphasized that Kenya needs to urgently act on the study findings to reverse the export gap. She said, "This report goes beyond analysis as it offers a clear roadmap. Kenya's markets exist, demand exists, but we must strengthen our competitiveness to seize our share. With predictable regulation, stronger value chains and sustained reforms, we can narrow the export deficit and grow our footprint across Africa and globally."

Ms Bomett also highlighted proposals to drive Kenya's export competitiveness, saying, "To unlock this potential calls for accelerating ongoing reforms aimed at streamlining regulations, reducing overlapping mandates, and expanding digital trade systems to make approvals faster and more predictable. It also calls for enhanced efficiency at Mombasa and Lamu ports, along with improvements along the Northern Corridor to ensure seamless regional movement of goods.



The study identifies clear opportunities to enhance competitiveness through improved regulatory efficiency, technology adoption, and strengthened skills development."



Peter Njoroge - Director of External Trade at the State Department for Trade



Friederike Hemker - Deputy Head of Cooperation at the German Embassy in Kenya

Strengthening SME capabilities, given that they are under-represented in export markets despite high entrepreneurial capacity is essential.”

Adding an international perspective, Friederike Hemker, Deputy Head of Cooperation at the German Embassy in Kenya, highlighted the scale of untapped opportunity and the need to address longstanding bottlenecks.

“Kenya has a USD 5.2 billion untapped export opportunity. High energy costs, complex procedures and long processes add significant burdens, but Kenya also has remarkable strengths: a vibrant entrepreneurial base, innovation and resilience. If these are matched with targeted reforms, trade can grow rapidly. Germany is committed to supporting Kenyan firms through frameworks such as the Kenya EU-EPA and Africa Free Continental Trade Area (AfCFTA), while also improving regional logistics through enhanced port efficiency and Northern Corridor upgrades,” she explained.

Speaking on behalf of GIZ Kenya, Dr. Christoph Zipfel, Director for Sustainable Economic Development, emphasized the importance of strengthening value chains as the backbone of competitiveness, saying, “The study was informed by the need for Kenya to look at opportunities that lie within intra and extra Africa Trade. It identifies clear opportunities to enhance competitiveness through improved regulatory efficiency, technology adoption, and strengthened skills development.”

With renewed collaboration between industry, development partners and government, the report positions itself as a practical roadmap for strengthening Kenya's export competitiveness.

With targeted interventions and coordinated action, Kenya can significantly expand manufacturing-led exports, reduce the export deficit and secure a stronger position in regional and global value chains.



Miriam Bomett - KAM Head of Policy & Regulatory Advocacy



FEATURE

KAM calls for deeper COMESA region integration

Tuesday, 7th October 2025, Nairobi: Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) has today called for deeper COMESA region integration, during the 18th COMESA Business Forum and Exhibition taking place in Nairobi.

The event, themed “Leveraging Digitalization to Deepen Regional Value Chains for Sustainable and Inclusive Growth,” brings together Heads of State, policymakers, private sector leaders, and development partners to chart a new course for regional trade and integration.

COMESA remains one of Kenya’s most strategic economic blocs and a vital source of raw materials. Overall, Africa accounts for about 42% of Kenya’s export market, with COMESA contributing 11%, behind the East African Community (EAC) at 30%, and the rest of Africa at just 1%.

Despite its potential, intra-regional trade within COMESA remains modest, accounting for less than 12% of total trade among the 21 member states. This highlights the need to strengthen regional value chains, enhance competitiveness, and source more goods and services from within the continent. Looking ahead, the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA), which unites COMESA, the EAC, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is expected to help address challenges of overlapping memberships while opening new opportunities for growth and cooperation.

Speaking during the Forum, H.E. Professor Kithure Kindiki, Deputy President of Kenya, called on COMESA member states to lead innovation and embrace digital transformation to drive

inclusive growth. He said, “Digital transformation is the key to deepening value chains for sustainable and inclusive growth. It is crucial that we embrace digitalization as a driver of economic progression within COMESA. Digital tools are enablers of innovation and competitiveness, they create a more diverse business environment, simplify the flow of goods and services, and reduce non-tariff barriers by modernizing customs and border procedures for seamless trade among COMESA member states.”

H.E. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary General of COMESA, emphasized the organization’s ongoing efforts to harness technology for trade facilitation and economic integration. She said, “This year’s Forum discussions will focus on four critical areas: business mobility, digital trade and investment promotion, agricultural productivity, and industrial development. COMESA has developed robust digital tools that are revolutionizing regional trade and integration, from integrated border management systems and the Digital Yellow Card System to smart border technologies and the Regional Payment System, which is increasing transactional value across all 21 member states. Most recently, we launched the Electronic Certificate of Origin Program in Eswatini, Malawi, Zambia, and now in Kenya.”

Highlighting the significance of regional cooperation amid global uncertainty, Hon. Lee Kinyanjui, Cabinet Secretary Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry, Kenya noted that, “This Forum has come at a time when the global trade and investment landscape is facing significant turbulence. Amid these uncertainties, intra-regional trade presents a strong solution. It



High Level Panel During the 18th Comesa Business Forum & Exhibition

is crucial to leverage COMESA by addressing the barriers that hinder trade among member states. We must also prioritize the free movement of people within Africa to unlock the full potential of our regional economies."

Representing the private sector, Hitesh Mediratta, Vice Chairperson of Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM), reaffirmed the industry's commitment to advancing regional integration and industrial growth. "COMESA presents immense opportunities for Kenya's manufacturing sector, not just as a market, but as a partner in building a more integrated, self-sustaining regional economy. Stronger regional value chains, harmonized standards, and efficient trade facilitation are not

aspirations, but necessities. To fully harness COMESA's potential, governments, the private sector, and development partners must work together to remove barriers, align policies, and unlock investments that drive industrial growth."

The 18th COMESA Business Forum and Exhibition runs from 6th October 2025 to 8th October 2025, showcasing innovations, partnerships, and investment opportunities in key sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, logistics, energy, and digital services. The recommendations from the High-Level Business Forum will form part of the COMESA Business Declaration to be presented at the 24th Summit of COMESA Heads of State and Government.



High Level Panel During the 18th Comesa Business Forum & Exhibition



Exhibitors during the 18th COMESA Business Forum & Exhibition



8th Changamka Shopping Festival Nairobi Edition

4th November 2025, Nairobi: The 8th Edition of the Changamka Kenya Shopping Festival officially kicked off today at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre (KICC), Nairobi, bringing together over 300 exhibitors from across the country. The five-day festival, running from Tuesday, 4th November to Saturday, 8th November 2025, is a celebration of Kenyan creativity, resilience, and enterprise under the theme: "Driving Kenya's Manufacturing Competitiveness through Inclusive, Sustainable Industrialization, Economic Diversification and Trade Partnerships."

The event, organized by the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) in partnership with the Ministry of Investments, Trade and Industry, is part of the wider Buy Kenya, Build Kenya campaign, aimed at promoting locally made products and deepening the country's manufacturing footprint across the region.

Speaking during the opening ceremony, Principal Secretary, State Department for Industry, Dr. Juma Mukhwana, CBS, highlighted Kenya's pivotal role in shaping the future of Africa's industrialization. He said, "Kenya has long been a gateway to East and Central Africa. The time when Africa concentrates on its problems is over, this is our moment to turn challenges into opportunities. If no one has electricity, then it is our time to innovate and provide solutions. We must leverage export opportunities, for when we export Kenyan-made goods, we tell the world that we are not just a market, we are producers, innovators, and exporters."

He added that with Africa's population projected to reach 4 billion in the coming decades, the continent's growth depends on countries like Kenya strengthening their manufacturing base, diversifying exports, and investing in sustainable value chains.

Echoing these sentiments, Kenya Association of Manufacturers Chief Executive, Mr. Tobias Alando, emphasized that the Changamka Festival has evolved into a powerful national platform connecting manufacturers, consumers, policymakers, and investors.

He noted, "Since its inception eight years ago, the Changamka Festival has become a powerful platform for connection, bringing together manufacturers, consumers, policymakers and investors under one roof. It has grown into the pulse of the Buy Kenya, Build Kenya initiative, showcasing the diversity and quality of products made right here at home. What makes Changamka special is that it gives Kenyans a real chance to see what local industries can do, to meet the people behind the brands and to appreciate the innovation that drives our manufacturing sector forward."

The festival features exhibitions across various sectors, including textiles, food processing, construction materials, household goods, technology, renewable energy among others. Attendees will have the chance to engage directly with local producers, explore new innovations, and experience firsthand the quality of 100% Made-in-Kenya products.

Beyond Nairobi, Changamka has expanded its reach to other regions, with successful editions held in Mombasa and Kisumu. The 5th Mombasa Edition, held in July 2025, drew thousands of visitors and highlighted the coastal region's growing role in driving industrial growth and trade connectivity.

Complementing the festival's showcase is the 3rd Kenya Industrialization Conference, which was held from Wednesday, 5th November 2025, also at KICC. The conference brought



Exhibitors during the 2025 Changamka Shopping Festival Nairobi Edition



Exhibitors during the 2025 Changamka Shopping Festival Nairobi Edition



Exhibitors during the 2025 Changamka Shopping Festival Nairobi Edition



KAM Chief Executive - Tobias Alando giving his Remarks during the 2025 Changamka Shopping Festival Nairobi Edition



PS Industry - Dr. Juma Mukhwana, CBS touring Exhibitor booths during the 2025 Changamka Shopping Festival Nairobi Edition



PS Industry - Dr. Juma Mukhwana, CBS touring Exhibitor booths during the 2025 Changamka Shopping Festival Nairobi Edition

together policymakers, industry leaders, investors, and development partners to deliberate on strategies that align with this year's theme. Discussions will focus on policy reforms, trade partnerships, and ways to enhance the competitiveness of Kenyan products in regional and global markets.

The Changamka Kenya Shopping Festival 2025 is made possible through the support of key partners and sponsors, including the UK International Development (FCDO), TradeMark Africa (TMA), Afreximbank, Stanbic Bank, NCBA, and Network International, organizations committed to advancing Kenya's manufacturing competitiveness and regional trade integration.

22ND ENERGY MANAGEMENT AWARDS

A part of the KAM Sustainability Award Series

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION & SUBMISSION OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS



Why Participate:

- Exposure to cutting-edge clean technologies and sustainable solutions
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- Recognition and visibility for leadership in sustainability and efficient resource management
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Registration Deadline: 27th February 2026

For enquiries, contact ema@kam.co.ke

Key Award Categories: **Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy, Water Efficiency, Transport Efficiency, Financial Institutions, Young Innovators, and County Award**



Ministry of Energy and Petroleum
State Department for Energy



2026 TRAINING CALENDAR

28 th January 2026	Navigating Smart Manufacturing, Data Science & AI Excellence Investment: Ksh10,000 + VAT
January - July 2026	Business Growth Program (BGP) - 7 Modules Investment: Ksh20,000 + VAT per module
11 th - 13 th February 2026	Occupational Safety, Health & Wellness (OSHW) Investment: KSH35,000 + VAT
25 th - 27 th February 2026	Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Investment: Ksh35,000 + VAT
18 th - 20 th March 2026	Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) & Equipment Reliability Investment: Ksh35,000 + VAT
25 th - 27 th March 2026	Instrumentation & Calibration Process Control Investment: Ksh35,000 + VAT
15 th - 17 th April 2026	Supervisory Skills & Workforce Interface Leadership in Manufacturing Investment: Ksh35,000 + VAT
29 th - 30 th April 2026	Virtual Training on Data Protection and Legal Considerations for Manufacturers Investment: Ksh17,000 + VAT
13 th - 15 th May 2026	Manufacturing Excellence (MANEX) & Advanced Lean Practices Investment: Kes 35,000 + VAT
21 st May 2026	Finance Professionals Forum In-house Training Program (Tailor-made) Investment: Ksh10,000 + VAT
17 th - 18 th June 2026	Tax Compliance & Financial Strategy for Manufacturers Investment: Ksh35,000 + VAT
26 th - 27 th June 2026	Data Science & AI Retreat Investment: USD 1,000 + VAT per person
1 st - 3 rd July 2026	Occupational Safety & Health (OSHW) Management & Compliance - Coast Edition Investment: Ksh35,000 + VAT
22 nd - 24 th July 2026	Good Laboratory Practices (GLP) & Quality Control in Testing Investment: Ksh10,000 + VAT
19 th - 21 st August 2026	Warehousing and Inventory Management Investment: Ksh35,000 + VAT
26 th - 27 th August 2026	Family Business Management Investment: Ksh10,000 + 16% VAT
16 th - 18 th September 2026	Good Manufacturing Practices(GMP) & Regulatory Practices Investment: Ksh35,000 + VAT
22 nd September 2026	HR Professionals Forum In-house Training Program (Tailor-made) Investment: Ksh10,000 + VAT
7 th - 9 th October 2026	Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) & Regulatory Compliance - Coast Edition Investment: Kes 35,000 + VAT
14 th - 15 th October 2026	Labour Laws & Employee Wellness for Manufacturing Investment: Ksh35,000 + VAT
18 th - 19 th November 2026	Customs Procedure & Roadmaps for Exports Investment: Ksh20,000 + VAT
26 th November 2026	Digital Sales/ Customer Service & Client Retention for Manufacturers Investment: Ksh5,000 + VAT
All Year Round	In-House Training Programs Ksh175,000 + VAT per Company

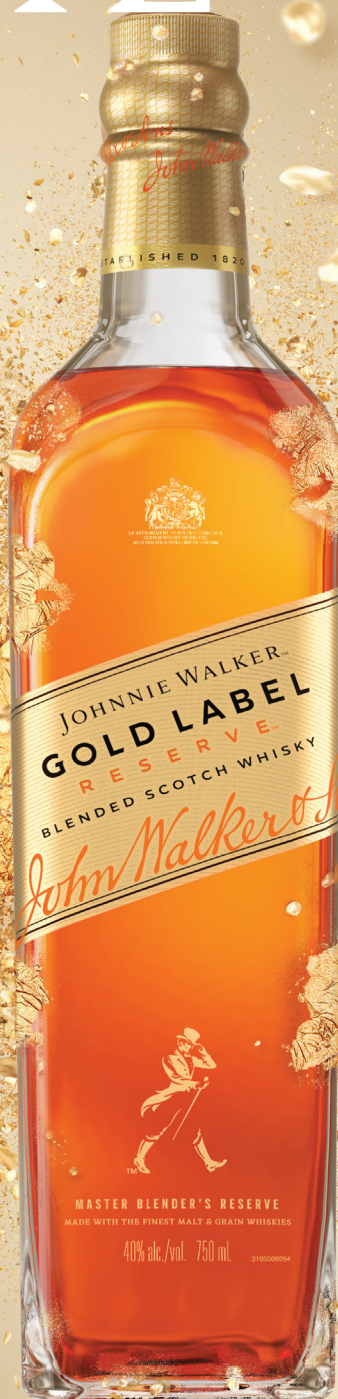
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