

Business Standard

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BUSINESS BRIEFS

Rwanda's startups overcome barriers to grow

KIGALI, MONDAY
RWANDA'S startup ecosystem has steadily emerged over the past decade as one of Africa's most promising innovation landscapes. From fintech and agritech to e-commerce and digital services, a new generation of entrepreneurs is rolling out solutions tailored to local realities.

Yet behind this momentum lies a more nuanced story, one of young companies navigating structural challenges while building resilience, adaptability and long-term potential.

For many founders, the journey is defined not just by obstacles, but by how those obstacles are shaping stronger, more grounded businesses.

For startups operating in highly regulated or traditionally structured sectors, one of the earliest hurdles is not just launching a product, but convincing people to use it.

Jet fuel costs surge faster than flights in Africa

CAPE TOWN/LONDON, MONDAY
AIRLINES are grappling with soaring jet fuel prices as the US-Israeli war on Iran has caused a supply shortage leaving consumers facing surcharges and airlines struggling to manage volatile costs as the fuel gets scarcer.

Africa is among the most exposed regions to both supply disruptions and higher prices. Around 70 per cent of jet fuel and kerosene imports to the continent flow via the Strait of Hormuz, according to financial and commodities analytics firm S&P Global.

Dollar gains as investors flee risk on escalating Middle East

TOKYO, MONDAY
THE dollar rose on Monday as escalating retaliatory threats in the Middle East conflict curbed risk appetite and lifted demand for safe-haven assets.

The Australian dollar, a liquid proxy for global sentiment, slid as equities sold off across Asia. Japan's top currency diplomat said his government is ready to take action to counter foreign-exchange volatility as the yen edged lower.

Hopes for an off-ramp to hostilities dimmed over the weekend, with US President Donald Trump threatening to strike Iran's electricity grid and Tehran vowing to hit back at infrastructure of its neighbours.

The head of the International Energy Agency (IEA) said the crisis is worse than the two oil shocks of the 1970s put together.

Branding gap costs billions in export value

By DATIVA MINJA

TANZANIA earns only a fraction of what its world-class products are worth.

From Kilimanjaro and Mbeya coffee to Zanzibar's cloves, cinnamon and vanilla, from coastal cashew nuts to Tabora's raw honey, the country produces goods that meet global standards. Yet most are exported as unbranded commodities, leaving the largest share of value to be captured elsewhere.

"The problem is not quality, it is branding. We produce some of the finest goods in the world, yet we sell them as commodities," the Tanzania Trade Development Authority (Tantrade) Director General, Dr Latifa Khamis, told the Daily News.

Branding, she argues, goes far beyond logos or packaging. It is the full perception a customer holds about a product, its story, consistency, quality, identity and emotional connection, often reinforced by national origin.

Climbing the value chain
The cost of weak branding is significant.

A kilogramme of raw cashew nuts typically fetches between 2 and 3 US dollars. The same nuts, when processed, packaged and marketed under a strong brand, can sell for between 15 and 25 US dollars.

The difference is not production, it is positioning.

Branding allows producers to move up the value chain, retain profits domestically and compete beyond price. Without a clear identity, Tanzanian products risk invisibility in crowded global markets.

"Consumers buy trust, authenticity and experience, not just a product," Dr Khamis notes.

A jar labelled organic wild forest honey from Katavi, Tanzania can command several



INDIVIDUALS pose in front of a 'Made in Tanzania' banner during the Made in Tanzania Expo in Dar es Salaam, an initiative focused on promoting local products, supporting domestic manufacturers and enhancing the global visibility of Tanzanian goods. (File photo)

times the price of the same honey sold generically. Over time, such differentiation builds customer loyalty, often a company's most valuable asset.

Global lessons in branding
Other African economies have demonstrated what is possible.

Ethiopia transformed its coffee sector by branding and trademarking premium varieties such as Yirgacheffe, Harrar and Sidamo turning a commodity into a premium global product. The strategy is estimated to have generated an additional 100 million US dollars in annual export revenue.

Kenya has similarly positioned its tea as a high-quality,

traceable product, consistently attracting premium prices at international auctions.

According to Tantrade's Manager for Capacity Building and Advisory Services, Eng Boniface Mrema, international buyers now demand far more than raw quality.

"Retailers in Europe, North America and the Gulf expect professional packaging, traceability, certification and compelling product stories. Well-branded Tanzanian products can secure premium shelf space and compete effectively," he says.

Untapped potential at home
Zanzibar's spices illustrate the

opportunity.

With improved packaging, certification and storytelling, the islands could evolve into a globally recognised premium spice hub. Similar opportunities exist across coffee, honey, cashews and other export crops.

Digital platforms are lowering barriers to entry. Tanzanian entrepreneurs can now reach consumers directly in markets such as New York, Berlin and Tokyo through platforms like Amazon, Shopify and social media channels.

At the centre of this effort is the 'Made in Tanzania' mark, managed by Tantrade. More than a label, it is intended to signal quality, authenticity and

national identity.

"Every product that carries this mark represents the reputation of Tanzania," Dr Khamis says. "Businesses are not just selling goods, they are shaping how the country is perceived globally."

Barriers to overcome
Despite the opportunity, structural challenges remain.

An expert in private sector development and economic diplomacy, Mr Octavian Mshiu, points to limited branding knowledge among entrepreneurs, continued reliance on raw exports, weak packaging standards and inadequate digital presence.

Access to finance for branding and marketing remains constrained, while limited adoption of internationally recognised certifications restricts entry into premium markets.

Tanzania's next phase of trade growth will depend less on what it produces and more on how it presents it.

The country has the resources, skills and product quality to compete globally. What is required is a shift from volume-driven exports to value-driven branding.

"Stop selling what is grown in Tanzania. Start selling what stands for Tanzania," Dr Khamis urges. "Build brands. Own value. Represent the nation."

Lab-to-market STEM initiative fuels future workforce

By DAILY NEWS Reporter

IMPROVED science laboratory infrastructure in secondary schools is a key driver of Tanzania's human capital formation, enhancing practical STEM skills and labour market alignment.

This strengthens workforce productivity, supports innovation and contributes to long-term, technology-driven economic growth.

Across the country, students are not only recording stronger academic results but are also developing practical competencies and a growing interest in science-related careers, key ingredients for a competitive, knowledge-based economy.

At the grassroots level, these investments are already influencing career thinking and entrepreneurial ambition.

At Kamagi Secondary School in Sikonge District, Tabora Region, students are beginning to align education with economic opportunity.

Form Four student Ms Magreth Mlolasa and Form One student, Nadia Mwingireza say their decision to pursue science subjects is driven by the potential for self-employment and career advancement.

Ms Magreth, for example, aims to become a pharmacist and establish her own pharmacy business, combining healthcare service delivery with entrepreneurship rather than relying solely on formal employment.

Such emerging mindsets underscore the broader value of STEM investment, not just in improving education outcomes, but in fostering a generation capable of creating jobs and driving innovation.

A Form Five science student, Mr Jurnior Kimaro, further explained that self-employment offers an opportunity to apply scientific knowledge and skills to create independent sources of income.

"Self-employment could involve starting a business or offering services based on science-related expertise, de-

veloping technical solutions in areas like ICT or engineering, running a pharmacy, providing laboratory services, or engaging in modern agriculture," he said.

Mr Kimaro added that self-employment represents a pathway to financial independence and a practical way to turn classroom knowledge into real-world solutions. It also offers opportunities to innovate, address challenges within the community and build a future as a job creator rather than a job seeker.

These positive outcomes were also recently highlighted by education stakeholders from Kigoma, Tabora and Songwe regions during an inspection visit by UNICEF Tanzania Education Specialist, Dr Ayoub Kafyulilo, at Kakonko Girls Secondary School.

Assessing the newly constructed laboratories, Dr Kafyulilo emphasised that improved infrastructure is transforming how science is taught and learned, while preparing students for the demands of an increasingly technology-driven

global economy.

"This is about more than just classrooms; it is about shaping the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs," Dr Kafyulilo said.

This progress follows targeted investments in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education led by the Tanzania Education Authority (TEA) in partnership with UNICEF and funded by the Government of Canada.

The initiative, implemented in two phases beginning in the 2023/2024 financial year, has focused on strengthening laboratory infrastructure in Kigoma, Songwe and Tabora regions.

The two-year joint project, worth 1.28bn/-, aimed to strengthen science laboratory infrastructure in secondary schools. In the first phase, 344.2m/- was invested to construct, complete and renovate nine science laboratories.

Building on this foundation, the second phase, launched in the 2024/2025

financial year, allocated 936.7m/- to expand the effort, supporting the construction and rehabilitation of 44 laboratory rooms across 20 schools.

At Kakonko Girls Secondary School, Deputy Head, Mr Alex Kagoma noted that the introduction of three fully equipped laboratories for Chemistry, Biology and Physics has significantly improved academic performance.

"The school's first cohort of 58 Form Four graduates achieved outstanding results, with all students passing and the majority attaining high divisions," he noted.

He attributes this success to enhanced practical learning, which has enabled teachers to deliver lessons more effectively while improving students' understanding of scientific concepts.

"The laboratories have transformed how we teach and how students learn. Practical experience has made a huge difference," Mr Kagoma said.

Similar gains are being recorded elsewhere. At Itumba Secondary School in Ileje Dis-

trict, Deputy Head Mr Deogratius Msusa noted that student engagement and performance in science subjects have improved markedly compared to previous years when laboratory facilities were inadequate.

He added that the availability of hands-on learning has strengthened both teaching quality and student outcomes, giving students the confidence and motivation to pursue science pathways.

In Songwe Region, Nkangamo Secondary School has witnessed a surge in science enrolment from fewer than ten students to significantly higher numbers, following laboratory upgrades and curriculum reforms that allow early subject specialisation.

Mr Msusa said this trend signals a growing confidence among students in pursuing science pathways when supported by the right infrastructure. Beyond academic metrics, the broader transformation is cultural and economic.

Teachers report increased motivation among students, while STEM clubs are foster-

ing curiosity, innovation and problem-solving skills.

The availability of laboratories is making science education more engaging and accessible, particularly for younger students who can now make informed subject choices earlier in their academic journey.

The initiative has also achieved wide geographic reach. In Kigoma Region, schools such as Kashoza, Gwanumpu, Migezi, Rugenge, Busami, Nyamidaho, Nyakitonto, Mount Samba and Masanga have benefited.

In Tabora, institutions including Dr JP Magufuli, Goweka, Langwa, Ngulu, Kizengi, Pangale and Usagali are among the recipients, while in Songwe Region, Bupigu, Shiwinga and Ndugu Secondary Schools have also received support.

Teachers, including Chemistry and Biology instructor Mr Kassim Mgayo, confirm that the availability of laboratories has boosted student motivation to pursue science subjects.

He notes that a large num-

ber of Form One students have expressed interest in science, particularly under the current curriculum, which allows early selection of preferred study pathways.

As Tanzania continues to prioritise industrialisation and economic diversification, investments in STEM education infrastructure are proving to be more than just social spending, they are strategic economic interventions.

By equipping students with practical skills, fostering entrepreneurial ambition and strengthening the education system, these initiatives are laying the foundation for a more skilled, innovative and self-reliant workforce.

In essence, science laboratories are not merely rooms with equipment, they are engines of opportunity, innovation and enterprise. They provide students with the tools, confidence and ambition to transform knowledge into livelihoods, creating a generation that can compete, innovate and contribute meaningfully to Tanzania's economic growth.