



Ruto heads to Moscow seeking trade deals and investment as Kenya eyes Russia partnership
President William Ruto departed for Moscow yesterday to attend the Third Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum, where he will seek new export markets for Kenyan goods **Page 8**



Meru residents demand justice over alleged police killing of teenager
Residents of Majengo in Imenti North Constituency, Meru County, took to the streets yesterday demanding justice for a 17-year-old boy allegedly shot dead by a police officer **Page 12**

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Daily ePAPER

Countdown 2027 , Waititu offered a personal apology and appealed to the court to treat him as a first offender

Waititu pleads for mercy

Former Kiambu Governor Ferdinand Waititu yesterday appeared before an anti-corruption court to plead for leniency ahead of his sentencing on November 2, 2026, after being convicted alongside his wife and two others in a Sh588 million money laundering and corruption case that has followed him through Kenya's courts for years.

Speaking through his lawyer during mitigation proceedings before Chief Magistrate Harrison Barasa at the anti-corruption magistrate's court, Waititu offered a personal apology and appealed to the court to treat him as a first offender. "I apologise for whatever wrong I did. I am a first offender together with my wife, so when sentencing, please consider that," he said.

The plea marked a significant moment in one of Kenya's most closely watched corruption prosecutions. Waititu, who served as Kiambu governor before being removed from office in January 2020 following impeachment over separate graft allegations, had initially been acquitted in the Sh588 million tender case before the High Court overturned that decision, found him guilty of corruption offences and remitted the matter to the magistrate's court for mitigation and sentencing.

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Former Kiambu Governor Ferdinand Waititu



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Ruto breaks ground on KSh70B cement plant that will create 3,000 jobs in Kitui

BY David Kimani

@themtkenyatimes

Some of the moments as captured in pictures

President William Ruto yesterday broke ground for a KSh70B cement and clinker manufacturing plant at Ngaie in Mwingi North Constituency, Kitui County, developed by Devki Group, which will create 4,000 construction jobs and employ more than 3,000 Kenyans permanently upon completion in August 2027.

The plant will process Kitui County's abundant limestone deposits into industrial output, anchoring a regional manufacturing base in an area that has historically exported raw materials without capturing downstream value. Ruto framed the investment as central to his administration's strategy of reducing Kenya's dependence on imported cement and positioning the country as a net exporter within the East African region.

"Through strategic investments such as this, we will strengthen local manufacturing, reduce reliance on imports and turn Kenya into a leading exporter in East Africa and beyond," Ruto said at the ground-breaking ceremony.

For Mwingi North, a constituency where large-scale industrial employment has been scarce, the plant represents a structural shift — converting geology into livelihoods.



Editor's Desk

The Mt. Kenya Times



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Group Executive Chairman

M. Danson

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dan-mwangi-1b47446b/>

Our Contacts

P. O. Box 101 675 - 00101 Nairobi, Cell: 0700 161 866, 0705 215 262

Editorial Desk: editorial@mtkenyatimes.co.ke, **Adverts:** ads@mtkenyatimes.co.ke,

News Desk: news@mtkenyatimes.co.ke, **Web:** www.mtkenyatimes.co.ke

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NEWS IN BRIEF



Police dispersed University of Nairobi students with tear gas yesterday after protesters blocked Waiyaki Way, burned tyres and disrupted traffic in demonstrations demanding government intervention to end the lecturers' strike now entering its fourth week. Students accused the Ministry of Education of silence while their academic lives unravelled. "It is now a month since this strike started. They have failed us. We are the biggest losers in this fight," one demonstrator said. Tony Ochieng went further, warning that students were dying by suicide and being arrested while the government played politics. Babu Junior said the strike could extend his degree by two years. The nationwide strike, which began on 2 October 2026 after negotiations between UASU, KUSU and the Inter-Public Universities Councils Consultative Forum collapsed, centres on salary disputes, working conditions and the unions' rejection of a KSh9.76B settlement they say was imposed without negotiation. UASU Secretary General Constantine Wasonga has warned the strike could continue indefinitely.



The Employment and Labour Relations Court has dismissed an application to jail Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Kenya over an unpaid compensation award owed to a former embassy employee, ruling that diplomatic immunity places the envoy beyond the reach of personal detention. The decision underscores a tension that labour courts across the world periodically confront — the conflict between enforceable employment rights and the near-absolute protections afforded to accredited diplomats under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. While the court's ruling was legally grounded, it leaves the former employee without an immediately actionable remedy against an employer shielded by sovereign privilege. The case raises uncomfortable questions about accountability for foreign missions operating in Kenya. Diplomatic immunity exists to protect the functioning of international relations, not to provide cover for unmet financial obligations to local workers — a distinction that Kenya's government may need to address through formal diplomatic channels if the compensation remains unpaid.



Kenya faces a potential liability of KSh180.73B if it terminates the 30-year contract for the Rironi-Mau Summit highway project, a figure that places the government in a difficult position as scrutiny over the terms of the deal intensifies. The exposure illustrates the financial architecture underpinning Kenya's infrastructure financing model, where long-term public-private partnership contracts typically include substantial termination penalties designed to protect investor capital and projected returns. While such clauses are standard in project finance globally, the scale of the potential liability raises legitimate questions about the due diligence conducted before the contract was signed and the risk transferred to Kenyan taxpayers in the process. With public debt management already under sustained pressure and the International Monetary Fund monitoring Kenya's fiscal position closely, a KSh180.73B contingent liability of this nature demands full parliamentary scrutiny and transparent public disclosure before any decisions on the contract's future are taken.



The Public Procurement Regulatory Authority has approved Pwani University and the Meru County government to invite tenders for two major healthcare facilities valued at a combined KSh18.37B — a teaching and referral hospital and a specialised cancer centre — in a development that could significantly expand Kenya's public health infrastructure. The dual approval signals growing momentum behind efforts to decentralise advanced medical care beyond Nairobi, where the bulk of the country's specialist healthcare capacity remains concentrated. A teaching and referral hospital attached to Pwani University would serve Kenya's coastal region, which has long relied on distant referral pathways for complex cases, while a dedicated cancer centre in Meru would address one of the most critical gaps in healthcare provision across Mount Kenya and the wider central and eastern regions, where cancer diagnosis and treatment facilities remain severely limited.



X owner Elon Musk is planning to transform the platform's Like button into a payments feature, a move that would embed financial transactions directly into the social media experience and accelerate his long-stated ambition of turning X into a financial super-app. The development, if implemented, would mark one of the most significant changes to social media interaction since the Like button became a defining feature of digital platforms. Rather than simply registering approval, a tap on the button could initiate a money transfer — turning everyday engagement into a potential revenue stream for creators, businesses and individual users alike. The plan aligns with Musk's broader vision for X as an everything platform rivalling China's WeChat, which has long integrated messaging, commerce and payments into a single seamless experience. Whether Western regulators and users will embrace the convergence of social interaction and financial data on a single privately owned platform remains the critical question.



A lobby group led by former Chief Justice David Maraga yesterday accused Parliament of systematically weakening Kenya's electoral safeguards ahead of the August 2027 general election, raising alarm about the integrity of the legal framework governing the vote. The accusations land at a moment of heightened political sensitivity. With political formations already manoeuvring for position, concerns about compromised electoral oversight carry particular weight — any perceived erosion of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission's independence or of the legal protections surrounding the vote risks delegitimising an election before campaigning has formally begun. Maraga, whose tenure as Chief Justice was defined by the landmark 2017 presidential election annulment, commands credibility on matters of electoral law. His group's intervention signals that civil society intends to hold Parliament accountable for every legislative amendment touching the electoral framework between now and polling day — and that any weakening of safeguards will face organised, vocal and legally informed opposition.

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Investors The President was equally direct on the question of raw material exports. “My instructions are that we should never export our soda ash in raw form

Ruto orders Magadi soda ash monopoly broken as new investors set to enter

President directs Mining CS Joho to open Lake Magadi’s 240,000-acre mineral belt to four or five firms, demanding local glass and chemical manufacturing replace raw exports

BY Grace Wanja

@themkenyaintimes

President William Ruto yesterday directed Mining Cabinet Secretary Hassan Joho to open Lake Magadi’s vast soda ash industry to between four and five new companies, ending Tata Chemicals’ long-standing dominance over one of Kenya’s most significant mineral resources and requiring that raw soda ash be processed locally rather than exported.

The directive, issued publicly by Ruto, marks a decisive shift in government policy towards Magadi and sets up what could become one of the most consequential restructuring exercises in Kenya’s extractive sector. The 240,000-acre mining area in Kajiado County holds some of the world’s largest deposits of soda ash — a raw material used in the manufacture of glass, detergents, chemicals and a range of industrial products — and Ruto made clear he intends to ensure Kenya captures far more of that value chain domestically.

“I have given clear instructions to the CS of Mining on what will go on in Magadi. Now that the cases have been determined in court, we must expand opportunities in Magadi,” Ruto said. “There is no way we are going to allow one company to monopolise a big resource that can support industries in Kenya.”



President William Ruto with Mining Cabinet Secretary Hassan Joho

The President was equally direct on the question of raw material exports. “My instructions are that we should never export our soda ash in raw form. It must be added value here in Kenya, in Kajiado County. That facility will accommodate four to five companies,” he said, before addressing Joho by name: “You have my clear and firm instructions that that must happen. We must manufacture glass in Kenya using the raw materials in Magadi.”

The intervention represents a notable evolution in the government’s position. Ear-

lier pressure had focused on pushing Tata Chemicals, the Indian conglomerate that has operated at Magadi for decades, towards an exit. The current directive suggests a recalibrated approach — one that would retain existing operations within a more competitive framework while introducing new industrial players capable of driving local manufacturing, creating employment and generating greater fiscal returns for both the national and county governments.

Joho, who signalled the policy direction in a statement on

7 September 2026, confirmed that the government would reopen the process to attract investors. “We will re-advertise, and they must show us what they will do for this country,” he said — a formulation that places productive contribution, not merely financial capacity, at the centre of the selection criteria.

The commercial logic behind the directive is straightforward. Kenya currently exports soda ash in its raw state, effectively subsidising the manufacturing industries of importing countries rather than building its own.

Glass production, chemical manufacturing and detergent processing are established industrial activities that create skilled employment, generate tax revenues and build supply chains. Requiring that soda ash be processed domestically before export would accelerate Kenya’s industrialisation agenda and align with the broader African Union push, championed by Ruto himself, for African countries to add value to natural resources rather than export raw commodities.

The path to implementation, however, is considerably more complicated than the presidential directive suggests. Kajiado Governor Joseph Ole Lenku has made clear that Tata Chemicals cannot simply resume normal operations and that any new investor framework must first address a series of outstanding obligations. The company reportedly owes the Kajiado County Government KSh17B in unpaid land rates and royalties, while the Magadi community is said to be owed KSh1B in unresolved claims. The governor has also accused the company of failing to return community land and restore water supply from Nguruman — grievances that predate the current government and have accumulated over years of contested operations.

These competing demands place Joho in a genuinely difficult position. Attracting credible international inves-

tors to a site carrying significant regulatory and community liabilities will require the government to resolve, or at minimum credibly commit to resolving, those obligations before new commercial frameworks can be established with confidence. Investors conducting due diligence on Magadi will scrutinise the outstanding KSh17B county debt and the community land disputes as carefully as they assess the mineral reserves themselves.

With Kenya’s general election now less than a year away, the political stakes around Magadi are rising. Kajiado is a constituency whose votes matter, and the governor’s insistence on community rights and outstanding payments reflects local political pressures that Ruto’s government cannot afford to dismiss. The balance between opening the resource to competitive investment and satisfying legitimate grievances from the Magadi community will define whether this directive produces lasting industrial transformation or becomes another announcement that stalls in implementation.

The review’s outcome will determine not only the future of Magadi but the credibility of Kenya’s broader promise to turn its natural resource wealth into industrial capacity.

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Diplomacy Ruto travels to Moscow wearing two hats. As President of Kenya, he will push for market access for Kenyan tea, coffee, cut flowers, fresh produce and value-added goods

Ruto heads to Moscow seeking trade deals and investment as Kenya eyes Russia partnership

The President's visit to the Third Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum signals Nairobi's pursuit of new export markets, technology transfers and strategic alliances beyond traditional Western partners

BY David Kimani

@themtkenyatimes

President William Ruto departed for Moscow yesterday to attend the Third Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum, where he will seek new export markets for Kenyan goods, attract foreign investment and pursue technology partnerships as part of a broader push to diversify Kenya's international economic relationships.

The visit, confirmed by State House Spokesperson Hussein Mohamed, places Ruto at the centre of a geopolitical moment that carries significance well beyond bilateral trade figures. Kenya's decision to engage Moscow at this level reflects a calculated foreign policy position — one shared by a growing number of African states — that economic sovereignty requires maintaining relationships across competing global power blocs rather than anchoring exclusively to any single one.

Ruto travels to Moscow wearing two hats. As President of Kenya, he will push for market access for Kenyan tea, coffee, cut flowers, fresh produce and value-added goods. As the African Union champion for the African Continental Free Trade Area, he will advocate for broader African market integration, pressing for commercial frameworks that treat the continent not as a supplier of raw materials but as a producer of finished goods capable of competing on global terms.

The commercial agenda is ambitious. Kenya's export basket, while diverse by regional standards, remains heavily dependent on a narrow set of markets and commodities. Expanding into Russia and through Russia into Central Asian and Eastern European supply chains would reduce that dependence and provide Kenyan farmers, processors and manufacturers with the price stability that comes from market diversification. Ruto is expected to seek investments in agro-processing, manufacturing, energy and infrastructure — sectors where Kenya



President William Ruto

has productive capacity but requires capital, technology and reliable off-take agreements to scale.

The technology dimension of the visit is equally significant. Planned engagements around artificial intelligence, digital innovation and technology transfer reflect Kenya's ambition to position itself as a continental leader in the digital economy. Nairobi's tech sector, anchored by the Konza Technopolis project and a thriving start-up ecosystem that has attracted significant venture capital in recent years, needs partnerships that provide access to emerging technologies and skills training at scale. Ruto is expected to explore agreements that could accelerate digital infrastructure development and equip Kenya's young population — the majority of whom are under 35 — with skills relevant to a rapidly changing global labour market.

Food security will also feature prominently. Kenya has faced persistent pressure on agricultural input costs, particularly fertiliser prices, which spiked sharply following the disruption of global supply chains. Securing affordable and reliable agricultural inputs through direct government-to-government agreements would provide Kenyan farmers with

greater cost certainty, improve yields and strengthen the country's broader food security position. Russia, as one of the world's largest producers of fertilisers and agricultural chemicals, represents a potentially significant supply partner for a country determined to expand domestic food production.

The Africa-Russia Business Roundtable will give Ruto a platform to market Kenya as an investment destination and as a gateway to African markets — a pitch he has made consistently in Washington, London, Beijing and Riyadh. The consistency of the message reflects an understanding that Kenya's greatest competitive advantage is not simply its own domestic market of 55 million people, but its position as a logistics, financial and commercial hub for a region of several hundred million. Investors who establish in Nairobi gain access not only to Kenya but to East Africa, and through AfCFTA, to an increasingly integrated continental market.

The political dimension of the forum cannot be separated from the economic one. African leaders gathering in Moscow will engage Russia on global peace, regional security challenges and the reform of inter-

national governance structures. The African Union's long-standing call for greater representation in multi-lateral institutions — from the United Nations Security Council to the International Monetary Fund — will find a sympathetic audience in Moscow, which has its own grievances with the existing architecture of global governance. Ruto and other African heads of state are expected to advocate for equitable partnerships based on mutual respect and sovereign equality, a formulation that signals discomfort with conditionality-laden engagements and a preference for relationships that do not carry political strings.

This diplomatic positioning carries domestic resonance. In a pre-election year — Kenya goes to the polls in August 2027 — Ruto's foreign policy activism serves a political as well as an economic purpose. Each overseas engagement that yields tangible commitments around jobs, investment or trade reinforces the government's narrative of economic transformation and international relevance. The Moscow visit, coming after engagements across Europe, North America, the Gulf and Asia, reinforces the image of a president pursuing Kenya's interests across

every available frontier.

Critics will note that the gap between forum commitments and ground-level economic outcomes in Kenya remains wide. Previous high-profile investment pledges have not always translated into operational projects within promised timelines. The government will face scrutiny over whether the partnerships announced in Moscow produce measurable results — jobs created, factories built, export volumes increased — within a timeframe that matters to voters.

On the sidelines of the forum, Ruto is scheduled to meet other heads of state, international organisations, financial institutions and major corporations. These bilateral engagements are often where the most consequential agreements are struck, away from the formal forum proceedings and their diplomatic choreography.

Kenya's foreign policy has, under Ruto, been defined by an assertive pursuit of economic opportunity wherever it can be found. Moscow is the latest stop on that journey — a journey that will ultimately be judged not by the distances travelled, but by the returns delivered.

Courts “I apologise for whatever wrong I did. I am a first offender together with my wife, so when sentencing, please consider that,” Waititu said.

Waititu begs for mercy as Sh588M corruption sentencing looms

Former Kiambu governor faces November 2 reckoning after High Court overturned his acquittal — and Kenya’s political class is watching closely

BY James Mwangi

[@themkenyaintimes](#)

Former Kiambu Governor Ferdinand Waititu yesterday appeared before an anti-corruption court to plead for leniency ahead of his sentencing on November 2, 2026, after being convicted alongside his wife and two others in a Sh588 million money laundering and corruption case that has followed him through Kenya’s courts for years.

Speaking through his lawyer during mitigation proceedings before Chief Magistrate Harrison Barasa at the anti-corruption magistrate’s court, Waititu offered a personal apology and appealed to the court to treat him as a first offender. “I apologise for whatever wrong I did. I am a first offender together with my wife, so when sentencing, please consider that,” he said.

The plea marked a significant moment in one of Kenya’s most closely watched corruption prosecutions. Waititu, who served as Kiambu governor before being removed from office in January 2020 following impeachment over separate graft allegations, had initially been acquitted in the Sh588 million tender case before the High Court overturned that decision, found him guilty of corruption offences and remitted the matter to the magistrate’s court for mitigation and sentencing.

His defence team mounted a carefully structured argument for leniency, urging the court to weigh the purpose of punishment alongside the specific circumstances of the case. Counsel pointed to an audit report produced by the State during trial, arguing it demonstrated that no public funds were ultimately lost in the transactions at the heart of the prosecution. “What has instead been faulted is the process leading to the award of the tender,” the defence submitted — a distinction it presented as material to the appropriate level of punishment.

The defence also highlighted the substantial financial penalties Waititu and his co-accused had already faced during proceedings, arguing that rehabilitation rather than further

punitive measures should guide the court’s approach. It drew attention to the contradictory findings reached at different stages of the case, noting that the accused had been acquitted at one level before being found guilty at another — a sequence it argued created genuine legal uncertainty about ultimate culpability.

Counsel confirmed that an appeal had already been filed at the Court of Appeal. “Going by the history of the case, where one court finds the accused innocent and the other guilty, there is every possibility that the Court of Appeal might arrive at a different opinion, which could be on the innocence of the accused persons,” the defence submitted. The argument was pointed: sentencing a man whose conviction remains subject to further appellate review should, his team contended, attract proportionate rather than maximum punishment.

The other convicts in the case — Testimony Enterprises director Charles Mbuthia and his wife Beth Wangeci — also made mitigation submissions, each seeking consideration of personal circumstances before Barasa determines their sentences. The court heard all submissions before adjourning to allow the magistrate time to assess the arguments presented.

The Sh588 million case originated from a tender awarded during Waititu’s tenure as governor, with prosecutors successfully arguing at the High Court that the procurement process was tainted by corruption. The High Court’s decision to overturn the earlier acquittal was itself a significant development, reflecting the judiciary’s willingness to scrutinise lower court decisions in high-profile graft cases — a signal that Kenya’s anti-corruption architecture retains prosecutorial and judicial teeth even when politically connected figures are in the dock.

The timing of the sentencing carries weight well beyond the individuals directly involved. With Kenya heading towards a general election in August 2027, the political environment around accountability and governance is intensifying. Waititu remains a recognisable figure in



Former Kiambu Governor Ferdinand Waititu

Central Kenya politics, and the outcome of his sentencing will be read by observers as an indicator of how seriously the courts intend to treat corruption convictions against former senior officials.

The period leading to next year’s election is already being shaped by questions of who is eligible to stand, who carries legal liability from past conduct and whether convictions will hold through the appellate process in time to affect the ballot. Kenya’s courts are, by necessity, becoming an arena in which political futures are decided alongside criminal ones. Waititu’s case sits squarely

at that intersection.

For prosecutors, a custodial sentence would represent the culmination of a long and legally complicated process. The case survived an acquittal, a High Court reversal and sustained appellate argument — a journey that tested the resilience of Kenya’s anti-corruption institutions and, ultimately, found them capable of holding a former governor to account. The Director of Public Prosecutions will be watching November 2 as a test of whether convictions secured at considerable institutional cost are followed by sentences that carry genuine deterrent weight.

For Waititu himself, the courtroom on November 2 will deliver the most consequential verdict of his public life. His plea for mercy — framed around first-offender status, expressed remorse and the possibility of appellate vindication — is a final attempt to influence an outcome that will define how his political legacy is remembered.

Chief Magistrate Barasa will deliver sentences for all convicted parties on November 2, 2026.

Meru Nkanata also directed criticism at individuals who actively encourage PSV operators to collect passengers at unauthorised points, describing them as obstacles to orderly town management

Meru municipal boss cracks down on illegal PSV stages and addresses market traders' complaints

Municipal manager Gitobu Nkanata warns PSV operators over unauthorised passenger pick-ups as Gakoromone market traders await road repairs

BY Brian Gitonga
@themtkenyatimes

Meru Town Municipal Manager Gitobu Nkanata yesterday put public service vehicle operators on notice, warning that the municipality would enforce regulations against picking up passengers at unauthorised locations and would not tolerate continued flouting of designated stage

arrangements across the town. Speaking at a press briefing at Meru Town Hall, Nkanata said PSV operators had clear instructions to use designated pick-up and drop-off points and that no exceptions would be made for those found operating outside established rules. "We have clear instructions, and the law does not allow anyone to pick up passengers at undesignated locations, including along

roadsides. We will not make exceptions," he said.

The municipal manager accused some operators of deliberately bypassing designated stages to avoid paying required fees, describing the practice as a direct challenge to the municipality's efforts to bring order to public transport operations in Meru town. He named Mohammed Moti, Tuskys and Continental as designated stages for taxi op-



Meru Town Municipal Manager Gitobu Nkanata (Right) speaks to the press. | Photo: Brian Gitonga

erators and said all categories of public transport providers were expected to comply without exception.

Nkanata also directed criticism at individuals who actively encourage PSV operators to collect passengers at unauthorised points, describing them as obstacles to orderly town management. He warned that the municipality would act against both operators and those facilitating non-compliance.

The municipal manager then turned to a separate but equally pressing issue — the condition of the temporary Gakoromone market in the Canaan section, where traders relocated to make way for the redevelopment of the original Gakoromone Market have raised persistent complaints about poor road access and inadequate infrastructure.

Traders have accused the county government of failing to put in place sufficient road infrastructure following their relocation, saying the poor conditions are hurting business. Nkanata acknowledged the frustrations but said the county government was working with contractors and engineers to address the outstanding concerns progressively.

"We acknowledge that there are still challenges at the temporary market. Some have been addressed, while others are being resolved progressively," he said.

Among the most pressing concerns raised by traders is the condition of Shauri Road, identified as a major obstacle to accessing the market, particularly for vehicles transporting goods. Nkanata said the road had been excavated

approximately two weeks ago and quarry dust applied as part of initial improvement works. He said the municipality planned to add murram to the surface to reduce the risk of vehicles skidding during wet weather and ease movement for traders and customers alike.

Similar works were also planned for the road linking the western side of Canaan to Kooje. Nkanata said the contractor had been instructed to assess what improvements were needed and to consult engineers before preparing a bill of quantities outlining the scope and cost of the proposed works.

"We have instructed the contractor to consult the engineers and prepare a bill of quantities so that the remaining challenges can be addressed," he said, urging traders to remain patient while the process unfolded.

The municipal manager called on Gakoromone market leaders to engage directly with the contractor and technical team to ensure trader concerns were factored into

the planning process. He said direct consultations would help identify priority areas and ensure the proposed improvements were responsive to the actual challenges on the ground.

Nkanata maintained that preparing a bill of quantities was a necessary procedural step before any works could begin and asked traders to bear with the municipality as it worked through the process. He reiterated the administration's commitment to improving conditions at the temporary site while keeping the broader Gakoromone Market redevelopment project on track.

For traders who have already endured months of disruption since their relocation, the assurances will need to be backed by visible action on the ground. The condition of access roads remains the most immediate concern, and the coming weeks will test whether the municipality's commitments translate into tangible improvements before the rainy season makes conditions worse.



Gakoromone Market Development Committee Secretary General Edwin Mwenda (In blue) Addresses the Press. | Photo: Brian Gitonga

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Farming Wendy, who supports farmers through the agricultural initiative Grow 254, approaches the challenge from the market side.

How Mount Kenya farmers are navigating the digital farming revolution

From Nyeri to Meru, smallholder farmers are weighing the promise of digital agriculture against the reality of tight margins and unreliable markets

BY Purity Benjamin
@themtkenyentimes

Before a farmer plants a single seed, several decisions have already determined whether the season will be profitable. Which crop has a reliable market? What will fertiliser and labour cost? Will water be available when needed? Will the selling price cover production expenses? These are not abstract questions. For smallholder farmers across the Mount Kenya region, they are the difference between a viable livelihood and a season of loss.

Jeff Tricks, owner of Jeff Tricks Farm in Kiawara, Nyeri County, understands this reality intimately. Farming, he says, involves decisions that begin long before planting and continue well after the final harvest. Technology could improve those decisions — but only if it genuinely addresses the challenges farmers face on the ground.

Wendy, who supports farmers through the agricultural initiative Grow 254, approaches the challenge from the market side. Her experience working with farmers in Nyeri and Meru has shown her that producing quality crops is only part of the equation. Farmers also need reliable buyers and prices that make their labour worthwhile. Together, their experiences raise a question that is becoming increasingly urgent across Kenya's farming communities: can digital tools make agriculture across Mount Kenya more productive and profitable, or will adoption costs leave smallholders further behind?

Agriculture remains central to Kenya's economy, yet in-

creased production does not automatically translate into better earnings. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics Economic Survey 2026 reported that agriculture, forestry and fishing grew by 3.1 per cent in 2025, while marketed agricultural production increased by 2.3 per cent to approximately KSh706B. National maize and milk production rose, though wheat output declined. These figures reflect a sector with variable outcomes, but they do not reveal whether individual farmers made profits. High input costs and unfavourable market prices can leave farmers struggling even after good harvests — a reality that statistics rarely capture.

This is precisely where digital technology holds genuine promise, through improved access to weather forecasts, irrigation systems, crop-monitoring tools and online marketplaces.

At Jeff Tricks Farm, every season begins with market research. "Before you start, you must first scout the market so you know which crop you are going to plant. You cannot just plant something because you feel like it," he says. Once a market is identified, the work begins: land preparation, planting, fertilising, weeding, irrigating and monitoring for pests and diseases. Then comes harvesting — and the separate challenge of finding a buyer willing to pay a fair price.

Labour, chemicals, fertiliser, tractor services and fuel are among the major costs Jeff identifies. Specialised machinery, including onion-transplanting equipment, adds further expense for small-scale producers already

operating on tight margins. For farmers with limited capital, modern equipment only makes sense if it delivers sufficient returns.

To illustrate the economics, Jeff uses a straightforward example: selling 10,000 kilograms of produce at KSh20 per kilogramme generates KSh200,000 in gross revenue. After deducting labour, transport, fertiliser, chemicals and other costs, the actual profit depends entirely on how well those expenses are managed. The example demonstrates why production volume alone does not guarantee financial success. Farmers need competitive markets and reliable price information just as much as they need a good harvest.

Wendy's work through Grow 254 brings this market-access challenge into sharp focus. She has supported approximately 30 women farmers in Nyeri and currently works with around 120 farmers in Meru, organised into groups. Her efforts have included encouraging organic farming and identifying markets where farmers can obtain better prices than brokers typically offer. Coordinating training and monitoring production across multiple locations proved demanding, eventually leading her to concentrate her efforts on Meru, where she works alongside agronomists who provide technical guidance.

Her central concern is straightforward and worth taking seriously. "We are open to new technology. Now the question is, what value does it translate to in the farmer's pocket?" she asks. Many smallholder farmers she encounters earn less than KSh5,000 monthly. For those

already stretched by production costs, sustaining subscriptions or investing in new technologies without clear financial benefits is simply not feasible.

Research suggests digital agriculture is already reaching some Kenyan farmers, though adoption remains uneven. A study by 60 Decibels and Busara, surveying 1,484 farmers across 38 counties between July 2023 and April 2024, found that 56 per cent had used at least one digital agricultural tool during the farming season and 46 per cent had accessed digital information or advisory services. Yet only 8 per cent of farmers who sold produce reported using digital solutions to complete those sales. Among non-users, just 12 per cent were aware of digital market services and only 10 per cent reported having access to them.

The findings reveal a significant gap between accessing agricultural information and using technology to secure actual sales. Phone ownership alone does not guarantee awareness, connectivity or the practical confidence needed to use digital services effectively.

Technology does not always mean expensive machinery or artificial intelligence. Sometimes its greatest value lies in improving a single farming decision. Digital advisory services can help farmers iden-

tify pest threats and receive timely guidance — though such tools must provide reliable information and complement, not replace, professional agronomic advice. Automated irrigation systems using timers or soil-moisture sensors can regulate water delivery and reduce manual monitoring when properly installed.

Jeff recognises the potential of automated irrigation but does not currently use sensors on his farm. For many farmers like him, affordability and awareness remain the primary barriers. The Food and Agriculture Organization has highlighted digitalisation and automation as opportunities to strengthen agricultural efficiency and resilience, but warns that high upfront costs, limited digital skills and inadequate support prevent many farmers from benefiting. Purchasing a sensor is only the beginning. Farmers must understand how to install it, interpret its readings, maintain it and respond appropriately. Demonstrations at agricultural shows are useful, but sustained training and after-sales support are equally important.

For digital agriculture to deliver lasting benefits across the Mount Kenya region, solutions must address farmers' actual needs. Technologies must be affordable and providers must demonstrate clearly how their services reduce costs, improve yields

or strengthen market access. Farmers need practical training and continued technical support — not just instruction on how a tool works, but honest guidance on its limitations. Digital marketplaces must connect farmers with credible buyers and provide trustworthy information on prices, demand and quality standards.

Success should ultimately be measured through tangible outcomes: reduced production costs, lower crop losses, improved selling prices and increased net income — not merely application downloads or user registrations.

The experiences of Jeff Tricks and Wendy illuminate two connected sides of agricultural transformation. Farmers must manage production costs, water, labour and pests while simultaneously navigating buyer relationships, price volatility and payment uncertainty. Digital tools can improve both dimensions, but technology alone cannot resolve every challenge.

A smarter farm is not defined by the number of sensors in its soil or applications on a farmer's phone. It is defined by whether the farmer can produce sustainably, reach a viable market and earn enough to make the next season worthwhile.



Using drones in farming Kenya

Meru The boy's aunt, Carol Maina, addressed journalists outside the station, describing her nephew as a well-behaved child and questioning why lethal force had been used against him.

Meru residents demand justice over alleged police killing of teenager

Family and community members march on Meru Police Station after 17-year-old is shot dead in Majengo, accusing authorities of inaction

BY Brian Gitonga

@themtkenyentimes

Residents of Majengo in Imenti North Constituency, Meru County, took to the streets yesterday demanding justice for a 17-year-old boy allegedly shot dead by a police officer, accusing authorities of failing to investigate the incident or communicate with the family in the days since his death.

The protesters, accompanied by the deceased's relatives and their lawyer, marched from Majengo to Meru Police Station, where they held a press briefing and called for accountability over a shooting they say occurred on Saturday.

The boy's aunt, Carol Maina, addressed journalists outside the station, describing her nephew as a well-behaved child and questioning why lethal force had been used against him. "We have so many unanswered questions as a family. Our son was a very obedient child, and we cannot understand why his life was taken. All we want is justice for him," she said.

Maina alleged the incident was the third killing of a young person in the area, raising broader concerns about the safety of children and youth in Majengo. She said parents were living in fear and called on authorities to intervene. "We cannot sit back and accept a situation where our children cannot move freely or speak without the fear of being shot like chickens," she said.

The deceased's cousin, Catherine Mbaya, accused police of withholding information from the family despite several days having passed since the shooting. She maintained the teenager had not committed any offence that justified the use of lethal force. "Our child did nothing wrong, and that is why we insist that justice must be served. We will not relent until we get justice for him," Mbaya said.

The family's lawyer, Kuria Karatu, raised serious procedural concerns, alleging that investigations had not commenced and that the crime scene had been interfered with, potentially compromising key evidence. He said a postmortem examination had not yet been conducted and that spent bullet cartridges had not been recovered from the scene.

"The postmortem has not been conducted to establish the cause of death, and the spent bullet cartridges have not been recovered. We suspect that no investigations have commenced," Karatu said. He demanded a thorough and transparent inquiry, warning that residents would continue pressing for answers until those responsible were held accountable.

The protesters also called on police command to provide regular updates on the investigation's progress, saying the absence of any official communication had deepened community suspicion over how the case was being handled.

The family's demands were

clear: a full postmortem, preservation of evidence, formal confirmation of whether their relative was suspected of any offence and a credible timeline for the investigation.

The allegations — including claims of previous killings in Majengo, interference with the crime scene and failure to open investigations — could not be independently verified at the time of publication. Efforts to reach Imenti North Sub-County Police Commander Hassan Bashir and the Meru County Police Commander for comment were unsuccessful before deadline.

The Independent Policing Oversight Authority, which is mandated to investigate deaths and injuries resulting from police action in Kenya, had not issued a public statement on the matter by the time of publication.



Lawyer Kuria Karatu speaks to the press. | Photo: Brian Gitonga



Catherine Mbaya, the deceased's cousin speaks to the press. | Photo: Brian Gitonga



Carol Maina, the deceased's aunt speaks to the press. | Photo: Brian Gitonga

Roads and electricity A connected home benefits through better lighting, food preservation, support for children's studies and reduced dependence on costly energy alternatives

Roads and electricity bring inclusive growth to Masinga as Ruto launches Ukambani development drive

BY James Kilonzo Bwire
@themtkenyentimes

A 33km road and KSh29.89M electricity project signal a deliberate push to connect rural Machakos communities to markets, services and economic opportunity

By James Kilonzo Bwire

The launch of the 33.13-kilometre Kagonde-Masinga-Kithyoko Road and the flag-off of Last Mile Connectivity Programme materials at Kithoko Village in Masinga Constituency, Machakos County, marked more than the start of two infrastruc-

ture projects yesterday. They represented a concrete commitment to bring essential services to communities that have long sat at the margins of national development.

President William Ruto presided over both launches during a development tour of Ukambani, which has prioritised roads, electricity, water supply and other public investments across Machakos, Makueni and Kitui counties. The message from Kithoko Village was direct: development must reach the village level, where people live, farm, trade and raise their children.

Roads are among the most

consequential investments a government can make in a rural community. They determine whether farmers can move produce to market in good condition, whether traders can reach customers affordably and whether residents can access schools, health facilities and employment opportunities without excessive cost or delay. In Masinga, where agriculture and small-scale trade remain central to household incomes, poor road infrastructure has long suppressed productivity and limited economic participation.

The Kagonde-Masinga-

Kithyoko Road addresses that constraint directly. Beyond easing daily movement, it opens the area to wider markets, reduces transport costs for farm inputs and harvested produce, and makes it easier for service providers and skilled workers to operate in communities previously difficult to reach. It will also strengthen emergency response, allowing ambulances and security services to reach residents more quickly. A 33-kilometre road of this nature has the potential to influence farming, trade, education, healthcare and public safety simultaneously.

Electricity, however, is what converts physical access into productive capacity. The Last Mile Connectivity Programme materials flagged off at Kithoko Village will be implemented by the Rural Electrification and Renewable Energy Corporation and are valued at KSh29.89M, targeting 200 households in Masaku and Gembeni villages. The figure may appear modest against larger national programmes, but its household-level impact will be immediate and tangible.

A connected home benefits through better lighting, food preservation, support for children's studies and reduced dependence on costly energy alternatives. Electricity also creates the conditions for small businesses to grow — welding workshops, salons, milling services, cold storage, mobile phone charging points and a range of other income-generating activities all depend on reliable power. Beyond individual households, schools can operate more effectively, health facilities can preserve vaccines and provide safer services, and traders can extend their working hours.

The projects in Masinga sit within a significantly larger programme. The cumulative investment in the Kenya Power and REREC electrification programme across Machakos County stands at approximately KSh5.54B, targeting 52,862 households. This is a major commitment to rural electrification, one that reflects a serious policy position: that access to electricity is a foundation for inclusive growth, not a secondary concern.



President William Ruto Flags-off of Last Mile Connectivity Programme materials at Kithoko Village

REREC's mandate, established under the Energy Act 2019, extends beyond connecting households to the grid. The corporation is also responsible for promoting renewable energy technologies including solar, wind, small hydropower and biogas. As rural electrification expands, it carries with it an opportunity to encourage efficient energy use, support clean cooking alternatives and reduce reliance on traditional biomass — contributing to the country's broader climate and energy agenda.

Roads and electricity are complementary rather than competing investments. A farmer benefits from the road to reach the market, but electricity enables that farmer to add value to produce, operate equipment and store goods for longer. A trader gains from better transport links, but power allows longer operating hours and the use of refrigeration or machinery. A school becomes more accessible through better roads, but electricity improves learning conditions through lighting and digital tools. A health facility becomes easier to reach, but power makes it safer and more effective. The simultaneous launch of both projects in Masinga recognises this relationship and responds to it.

The equity dimension of these investments is equally significant. Rural communities have long carried a disproportionate burden of poor infrastructure. High transport costs, limited electricity access and weak connectivity have restricted economic participation and deepened regional inequality for decades. The Kagonde-Masinga-Kithyoko Road and the Last Mile Connectivity Pro-

gramme seek to correct that imbalance, bringing public infrastructure to where it can make the greatest difference to ordinary households.

The success of both projects will depend on timely implementation, quality workmanship and sustained maintenance. A road must be completed to a standard that withstands weather and regular use. Electricity connections must be delivered safely and affordably. Community members must be informed about connection requirements and supported through the process. County governments, Members of Parliament, local administrators and community organisations all have a role to play well beyond the launch ceremonies — in protecting road infrastructure, supporting network safety and encouraging productive use of electricity through business development and improved farm operations.

Development becomes credible when it improves everyday experiences. A household that receives electricity will feel it directly. A trader who moves goods more easily will value the road. A student who studies under reliable light will benefit from the energy connection. A farmer who reaches the market without excessive delay will gain from the infrastructure investment. The launches in Masinga Constituency are a practical demonstration of a development philosophy centred on delivery, access and shared progress — one measured not in policy documents alone, but in the ability of communities to move freely, access power, build enterprises and improve their lives.



Life is better for those who overcome obstacles rather than compare themselves with others



Comparing yourself to others is not good. It can lead to disappointment and reduce your confidence. It does not help you grow instead, it weakens your strength.

Everyone has a unique life and a different way of living.
People have different skills and ways of approaching problems.
Obstacles are not barriers to success; they are stepping stones to victory.

You should aim high and work hard to achieve your goals.
So, do not compare yourself with others.
Be confident and walk your own path.
It will lead you to a better life.

__G.Yasminsirajudheen
Secondary grade teacher Melmalayanur block
Villupuram dt

Deepavali – A Celebration of Light, Culture, and Human Values

India is a land of traditions and cultural values. Its diverse cultures and significant religious beliefs are spread across the nation. It is a land with a rich linguistic heritage and deep respect for human values.

In India, festivals are celebrated according to different cultural traditions and religious beliefs. These celebrations reflect centuries of history, shared beliefs, and enduring human values.

Every Indian family eagerly awaits the festival of lights, Deepavali, internationally known as Diwali. It is one of the most widely celebrated festivals across the nation, bringing people together through the beauty of lights, the joy of sharing, and the spirit of human love.

The festival of lights brings together art in the form of decorations and spirituality through special prayers and poojas in temples across India. Family traditions of respecting elders, exchanging sweets, and sharing food add another dimension to these community celebrations.

The Meaning and Significance of Deepavali

The word Deepavali comes from Sanskrit and means a row of lights. The lighting of lamps symbolises the victory of light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance.

For centuries, the festival has represented hope, renewal, goodness, positive energy, and new beginnings. The celebrations differ according to regional customs, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions.

Mythological Stories Behind Deepavali

Deepavali is associated with several mythological stories and religious traditions.

In many North Indian traditions, Diwali celebrates Lord Rama's return to Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile and his victory over Ravana. The occasion symbolises the triumph of good over evil.

Many families also worship Goddess Lakshmi, who is associated with prosperity, wealth, and

good fortune.

In several South Indian traditions, Deepavali commemorates Lord Krishna's victory over Narakasura, symbolising the triumph of good over evil.

These diverse traditions demonstrate the richness and diversity of India's cultural landscape.

Deepavali in Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu, Deepavali celebrations traditionally begin early in the morning in many households. The day begins with the custom of taking an oil bath, wearing new clothes, and offering prayers.

Homes are decorated with beautiful kolam designs, adding colour and charm to the festive atmosphere.

The aroma of traditional delicacies, including adhirasam, murukku, mixture, and a variety of sweets, fills the air. The fragrance of flowers, the aroma of traditional cooking, and the scent of incense create an atmosphere of spiritual harmony in Tamil households.

These customs reflect the cultural richness of Tamil Nadu and the importance of family traditions. Deepavali is not merely a festival of lights; it is also an occasion to strengthen family bonds, share happiness, express gratitude, and spread love and kindness.

Viji. T
Cw writer
Namakkal
Tamilnadu
India



My lovely daughter



My lovely daughter, my lovely daughter,
You are mine, you are my dream,
I love you so much, I hug you so much.

Last night, you were sleeping on the bed,
I glanced at you.
I whispered, but said nothing,
I could only feel
That you were my darling.

You came to me as a gift,
Almighty God is great.
I trust you,
That you will always be sincere to your parents.

Your mom loves you,
Your dad looks after you.
Always smile,
And never be rude.

I know you are my lovely daughter,
You have the wisdom
To distinguish right from wrong.

I know you are my fairy,
I welcomed and wished for you,
You came into my life
And entered my home like Goddess Lakshmi.

I never considered you a burden in my life,
I am never sad to see you,
I never feel distressed to have you.

I am so delighted to have you,
My sweet daughter, you are like a fragrance,
Our life is like heaven,
And I feel blessed.

Composed by- Prakash Roy
(Samastipur, Bihar, India)

Thank you for publishing my poem “Heroes of Zeros”



To,
The Editorial,
Mt Kenya Times

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am writing to express my sincere thanks to the

Editor for publishing my poem “Heroes of Zeros” in your esteemed magazine.

I should specially thank Birinda Ma'am for her flawless support and encouragement to get my poem published.

I am obliged for this kind support, and I hope for the same in the future too.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

N. Sivakumar
India

Life is best for those who overcome, not compare:



Just be unique
Outstanding from being compared to speak
As comparison weakens our potential
Dragging down life away from prudential

We should track a clear way to seek
Overcoming towards the peak
With our name impressing positive critic
And not to be opaque
Let's grow ourselves with wings
Inspiring to fly towards spring
We may lose our confidence
Darkening life's best part of eminence
So life is best to live in our own version
Why to compare with another human?

G.Sarala.
*Creative Writers.

Gym The push for physical activity comes amid genuine concern about the health consequences of increasingly sedentary routines

Can Kenya turn its growing fitness movement into a national wellness revolution?

From Nairobi gyms to the Eldoret City Run, Kenyans are embracing healthier lifestyles — but turning enthusiasm into lasting change will require far more than events and guidelines

BY Collins Kibet

@themkenyentimes

Kenya is placing physical activity, preventive healthcare and mental wellbeing at the centre of its public health agenda, and the timing could not be more critical. From the launch of the country's first National Physical Activity Guidelines to the inaugural Absa Eldoret City Run scheduled for 1 November 2026, recent developments signal a growing national recognition that good health requires more than hospitals and medicines. The real question is whether this momentum can translate into lasting lifestyle change for ordinary Kenyans navigating demanding schedules, financial pressures and limited access to affordable recreational spaces.

On 11 June 2026, Kenya launched its first National Physical Activity Guidelines, a landmark public health initiative designed to encourage healthier lifestyles and reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases. Unveiled at KCA University in Nairobi before government representatives, health professionals and development partners, the guidelines provide tailored recommendations for children, adults, pregnant women and persons with disabilities. The announcement marked a significant step towards embedding preventive healthcare into everyday Kenyan life.

The push for physical activity comes amid genuine concern about the health consequences of increasingly sedentary routines. Many Kenyans spend extended hours sitting in offices, running businesses, attending classes or travel-



Gym & fitness centre

ling in public transport, often without structured opportunities for movement. Prolonged inactivity raises the risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension and a range of other non-communicable conditions — conditions that are placing growing pressure on Kenya's healthcare system.

Health experts behind the new guidelines note that regular physical activity reduces the risk of heart disease, certain cancers and mental health conditions including anxiety and depression. Exercise is not merely a weight-loss strategy. It is a foundational component of general health, mobility and psychological wellbeing — and that distinction matters enormously for public messaging.

Promoting fitness across Kenya, however, requires

an approach sensitive to the country's diversity. In many rural households, walking, farming, fetching water and domestic duties already involve considerable physical effort. In urban areas, residents may struggle to find safe spaces for running or cycling. Effective public health communication must distinguish clearly between structured exercise, everyday physical activity and the importance of adequate rest and recovery.

The planned Absa Eldoret City Run provides a timely focal point for Kenya's emerging wellness conversation. Launched by Absa Bank Kenya on 27 October 2026, the inaugural event offers Eldoret residents and surrounding communities an opportunity to experience organised physical activity as a

shared public health priority. City runs carry genuine value — they generate enthusiasm, build community participation and introduce people to structured exercise in an accessible, non-intimidating environment.

Yet the long-term impact of such events depends entirely on what happens after participants cross the finish line. A single sporting occasion cannot reverse unhealthy lifestyle patterns or eliminate structural barriers to regular exercise. Sustainable progress requires continuous community programmes, safe walking routes, accessible recreational spaces and consistent public education sustained well beyond race day.

Affordability remains one of the movement's most significant obstacles. Gym member-

ships, fitness equipment, specialised nutrition and personal training are beyond the reach of many Kenyan households already prioritising rent, food, transport and school fees. An effective national wellness movement must demonstrate convincingly that healthy living does not require expensive products or exclusive facilities.

Walking, jogging, dancing, stretching and home-based exercises offer practical entry points for millions of people. Community group walks, recreational sports and low-cost neighbourhood activities can extend participation further. Critically, however, exercise programmes must be adapted to individual health conditions, age and physical ability, and anyone with significant medical concerns should seek professional guidance before undertaking strenuous activity.

Nutrition is equally central to the wellness equation. Balanced meals, adequate hydration and sensible dietary choices are as important as physical activity. Kenyan households can draw on locally available foods — vegetables, fruits, beans, whole grains and other nutrient-rich staples — to build diets that reflect both nutritional needs and household resources, rather than chasing the unrealistic standards promoted by social media.

Mental health demands equal prominence in Kenya's wellness agenda. Financial uncertainty, unemployment, academic pressure, family responsibilities and demanding working conditions all affect emotional wellbeing in ways that exercise alone cannot resolve. Physical activity can support mood and help manage stress, but it is not a substitute for professional mental health care when that care is genuinely needed. Reducing the stigma around seeking psychological support remains as important as encouraging people to go for a morning run.

The Ministry of Health's World Mental Health Day activities in Gilgil, Nakuru County, on 12 October 2026 reflected continued institutional attention to psychological wellbeing within the broader healthcare agenda.

Awareness events matter, but sustained public education, accessible services and adequate support systems are what turn awareness into meaningful assistance.

The central challenge now is implementation. Government agencies, county administrations, schools, employers, healthcare providers and private organisations must collaborate to make healthy choices easier to adopt. Schools can prioritise age-appropriate physical activity. Workplaces can encourage movement throughout the working day. Counties can invest in safe, accessible public recreational spaces. Healthcare professionals can use routine consultations to counsel patients on prevention and healthy living — conversations that currently happen far too rarely.

Kenya's emerging wellness agenda should ultimately be judged not by the number of fitness events announced or the reach of health campaigns, but by whether ordinary citizens can sustain healthier habits over time. The National Physical Activity Guidelines and the Eldoret City Run are encouraging developments, but their true value will be determined by consistent implementation and genuine public participation across income levels, regions and age groups.

Kenya does not need to turn every citizen into an athlete. It needs to make healthy living a realistic, affordable and supported choice for everyone. A healthier nation will be built on informed decisions, accessible opportunities and a healthcare system that values prevention as much as treatment. Today's growing interest in wellness must become tomorrow's lasting commitment — and that transformation will not happen through guidelines and road races alone.

Education For years, we have treated mental stress as a private weakness rather than a shared human experience. In many Kenyan communities, the instruction has been consistent

Breaking the silence: How Kenya's schools can heal the hidden wounds of mental stress

From Nyeri to Nairobi, teachers and pupils carry emotional burdens that remain largely unspoken — and the cost of continued silence is rising

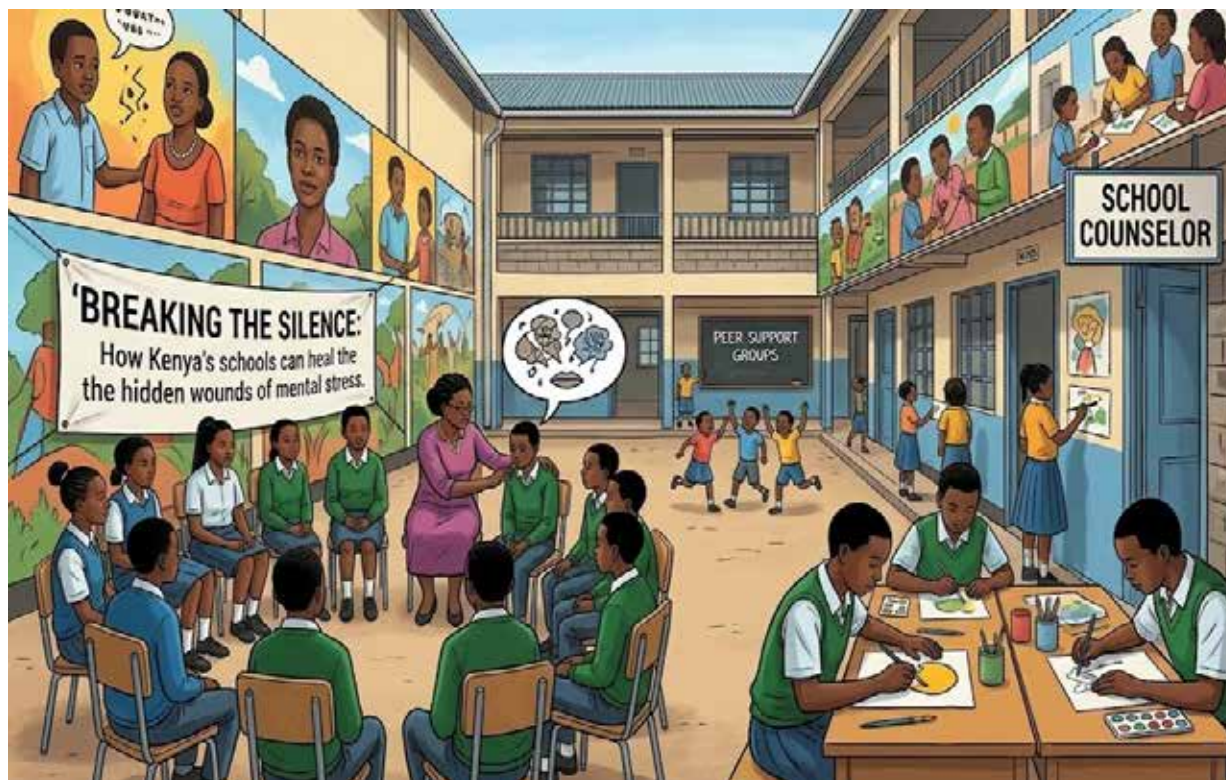


By: Wanjohi P. Mugambi
@themtkenytimes

Every morning, children walk into classrooms carrying more than books. Look closely and you will see it. Some carry hunger like a stone in their pockets. Some carry fear from home like a cold wind that never leaves their backs. Some carry the pressure to perform like a tight uniform that no longer fits. Many carry a quiet storm of thoughts they have no words to explain. In the staffroom, teachers arrive with their own weight — low pay, overcrowded classrooms, family expectations and the exhausting responsibility of being strong for everyone else.

For years, we have treated mental stress as a private weakness rather than a shared human experience. In many Kenyan communities, the instruction has been consistent: endure, be strong, pray harder and keep going. Resilience is powerful — as deep-rooted as a mugumo tree — but silence is dangerous, like a wound covered without cleaning. When stress is not acknowledged, it does not disappear. It transforms into exhaustion, anger, poor concentration, physical pain and broken relationships. Healing must begin where silence ends.

Mental stress is simply the body and mind's response to pressure. In small doses it is not harmful — it can motivate a student to prepare for examinations or push a farmer to finish planting before the rains. Think of it as a small fire that warms the house. The problem begins when that fire grows too large, burns too frequently and is given no time to cool. The mind shifts into a state of permanent alert, like a guard dog that never sleeps. Sleep becomes difficult. The heart races. Thoughts turn repetitive and negative, like a song stuck on a single chorus. A student who was once active becomes withdrawn. A teacher who was once patient becomes easily irritated.



Breaking the silence

In schools — and I have taught in both Nyeri and Nairobi — the sources of stress are many and deeply tangled. Academic pressure, fear of failure, bullying, peer rejection, poverty, school fees arrears, grief, exposure to domestic violence and the relentless comparison culture of social media all take their toll. For parents and teachers, the sources are equally complex: economic hardship, care-



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giving responsibilities, unresolved personal trauma and the lonely experience of having no one to confide in. Research in Kenyan primary schools shows that many children display clear signs of anxiety and stress, yet these signs are routinely misread as laziness, rudeness or a lack of discipline. A child who cannot concentrate may not need more punishment. That child may simply need someone to listen. Behaviour is often a language used when words have failed.

The cost of leaving stress unaddressed is significant and spreads like weeds across a shamba. In learning, stress reduces memory and concentration — a stressed brain struggles to retain information like a leaking jerrycan. This leads to poor academic performance, which in turn creates further stress, perpetuating a painful cycle. Physically, chronic stress weakens immunity and causes headaches, stomach problems and constant fatigue. Many unexplained hospital visits have their roots in prolonged emotional pressure. In relationships, stress makes people reactive — quick to shout at those they love, quick to withdraw from friendships. Families break apart not always because love is absent,

but because the emotional tools to manage pressure are missing. Across communities, unhealed stress fuels substance abuse, school drop-out and intergenerational trauma. Children learn to manage emotions by watching adults. If adults cope through silence, violence or alcohol, children absorb those same patterns. The World Health Organization has noted that mental health challenges among young people in Africa are rising sharply, yet stigma continues to prevent many from seeking help.

Healing from mental stress is not about finding one dramatic solution. It is about small, consistent practices that restore balance — much like daily sweeping keeps a house clean. The first and most important step is breaking the silence. Not every person in distress needs a professional counsellor immediately, but every person needs someone safe to talk to. In schools, this can be a trained guidance and counselling teacher, a trusted peer support club or a regular class circle where students are permitted to say they are not coping without fear of judgment. Creating just five minutes of genuine listening time in a busy school day can prevent a crisis — the way a small stitch prevents a tear from spreading

further.

Rebuilding daily routines also matters. Stress thrives in chaos, while healing grows in structure. Consistent sleep patterns improve emotional regulation. Teaching children four slow, deliberate breaths when anxious can calm the nervous system in under a minute. Physical movement — play, walking, farming, football, dance — releases tension that words cannot reach. Journaling and storytelling help to externalise pain. In Kiswahili, there is a phrase worth remembering: *kuandika ni kutibu* — to write is to heal. Literature and drama in schools are not luxuries. They are healing tools.

No one heals in isolation. Schools need to build genuine partnerships with parents, religious leaders and community health workers. A referral pathway that allows a struggling pupil to a local counsellor or health facility saves lives. For teachers themselves, peer support groups — spaces to discuss personal wellbeing rather than lesson schemes — are essential. You cannot pour from an empty cup.

If we teach mathematics and agriculture, we must also teach emotional literacy. Lessons in empathy, conflict resolution, self-awareness and coping skills belong on the timetable, not as an afterthought. When a child learns to say “I feel disappointed” rather than simply “I am angry,” that child gains a measure of control over their own responses. The theme of this year's World Mental Health Day — Break the Silence, End the Stigma — calls on schools to treat mental health as routinely and seriously as physical health. A wound in the mind deserves the same care as a wound on the leg.

Seeking professional help is not weakness. Just as we go to hospital for malaria, we should seek counselling for persistent stress and trauma. Community counselling centres, church counselling departments and county health facilities increasingly offer affordable support. Normalising their use reduces stigma the way light reduces darkness.

A healed classroom produces better learners. A healed teacher nurtures a healed generation. A healed community breaks the cycle of pain passed from parent to child. The work begins with each of us — listening more, judging less and building spaces where it is safe to say: I need help. Strength is not about never breaking down. It is about knowing how to rebuild together. Let us heal our schools, our communities and our continent — one mind, one conversation, one classroom at a time.

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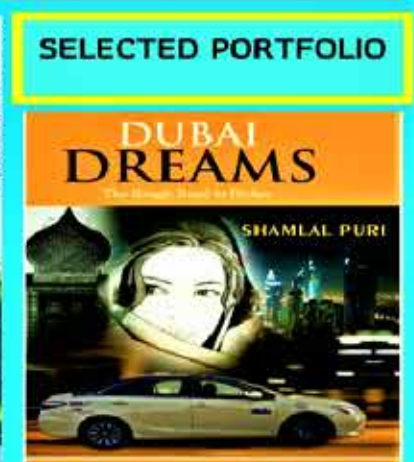
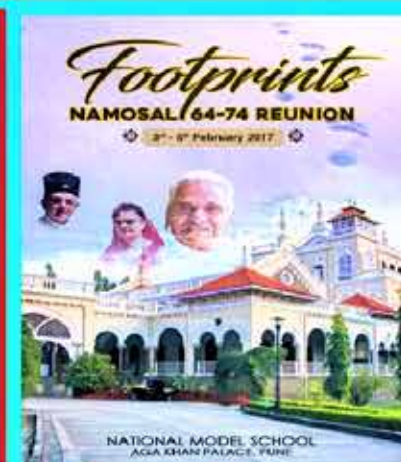
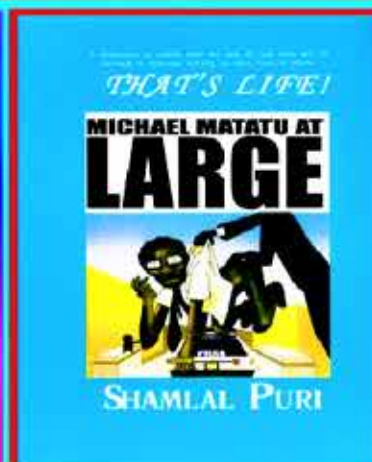
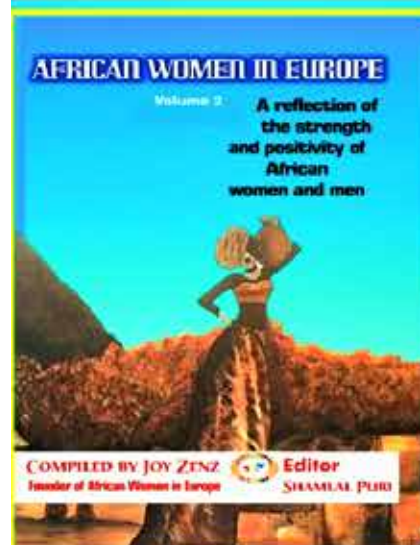
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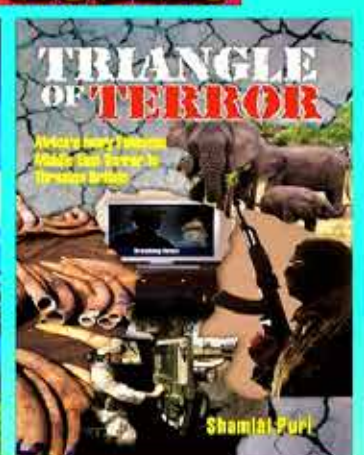
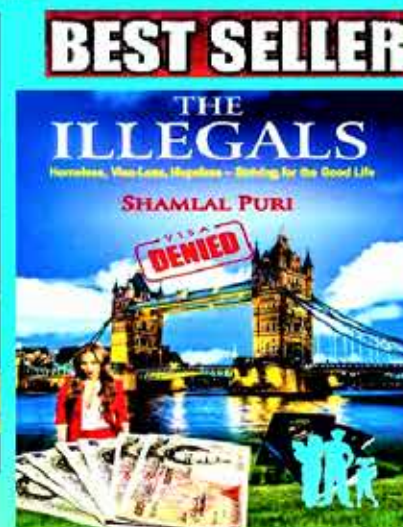
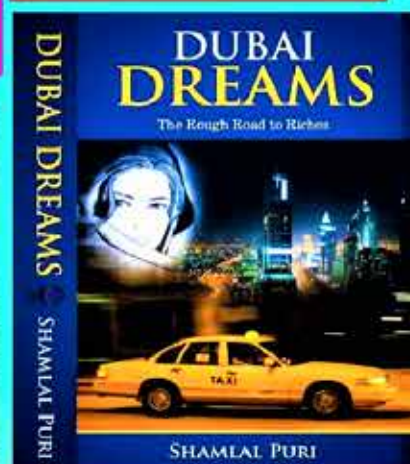
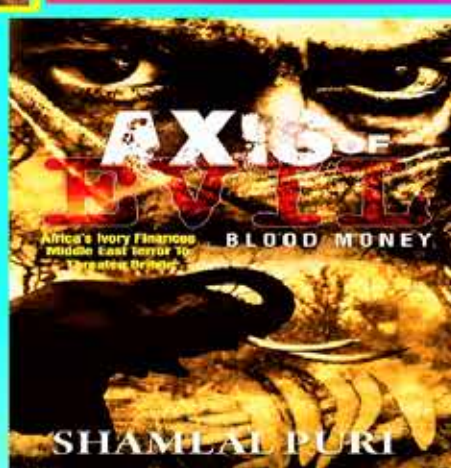
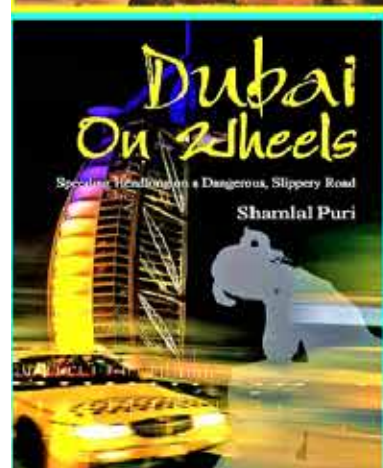
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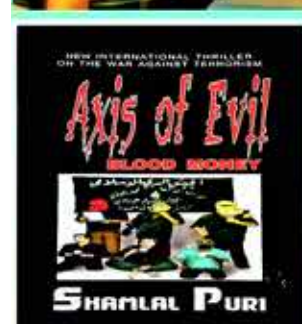
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Competition law Monopsony, by contrast, is the quiet giant. A single powerful buyer, or a handful of them, faces many fragmented sellers. It does not need to raise the price of what it sells

When the seller roars and the buyer whispers: Kenya's competition law and the uneven hunt for market tyrants



By: Jerameel Kevins Owuor
Odhiambo
@themkenyatomes

In 2023 the Competition Authority of Kenya sanctioned Majid Al Futtaim Hypermarkets Limited, trading as Carrefour, more than one billion shillings for abusing buyer power against suppliers of cooking oil and other goods. Rebates deducted without justification, listing fees extracted, contracts terminated on a whim, and commercial risks transferred downward formed the charge sheet. That single enforcement action stands as cold fact. The deeper issue it illuminates is sharper still: Kenya's competition regime has grown muscular against the seller who raises prices but remains curiously soft-footed against the buyer who depresses them. Monopoly draws thunder. Monopsony draws polite guidelines and delayed justice. The asymmetry is not technical. It is structural, historical, and costly to the very producers who keep this country fed and employed.

Consider the twin faces of concentrated power. Monopoly is the loud giant. A firm that controls half or more of a market, or that possesses market power even below that threshold, can raise prices, restrict output, or exclude rivals. Kenyan law has long recognised this danger. Section 23 and Section 24 of the Competition Act arm the Authority to declare dominance and punish its abuse. Cartels receive even less mercy. Nine steel manufacturers were fined a combined 338.8 million shillings after investigators recovered WhatsApp messages, emails, and meeting minutes proving coordinated price increases and supply restrictions. Building costs rose. Public projects grew more expensive. Consumers paid. The Authority moved with visible force.

Monopsony, by contrast, is the quiet giant. A single powerful buyer, or a handful of them, faces many fragmented sellers. It does not need to raise the price of what it sells. It sim-



ply lowers the price of what it buys, delays payment, imposes listing fees, demands free merchandising staff, or terminates contracts without notice. The supplier, often a small manufacturer or farmer with nowhere else to sell, absorbs the loss. Section 24A, inserted and strengthened by amendments culminating in 2019, prohibits exactly this conduct. Kenya became one of the first African jurisdictions to write buyer-power abuse into statute in explicit terms. The definition is precise: the influence to obtain more favourable terms or to impose a long-term opportunity cost disproportionate to any cost borne by the buyer. Delayed payments, unilateral termination, refusal of goods, transfer of costs, and significant price reductions where alternative buyers are scarce all fall within the net.

Enforcement statistics reveal the imbalance. The Authority has handled well over ninety abuse-of-buyer-power cases since the provision took full effect. In one reporting period it investigated 114 such matters, finalized most of them, and recovered tens of millions in delayed payments for suppliers. Delayed payment alone accounted for roughly three-quarters of complaints in recent years. Beneficiaries are overwhelmingly micro, small and medium enterprises entities that constitute 98 percent of Kenyan businesses, contribute about 40 percent of GDP, and employ roughly 70 percent of the working population. These numbers are not decorative. They describe the bloodstream of the

economy. When a supermarket chain or a large processor squeezes those enterprises, the injury travels far beyond the invoice.

Agriculture supplies the most vivid illustrations. Sugarcane farmers in designated catchment areas historically faced a single miller with little practical choice of buyer. State-owned mills, inefficient and repeatedly rescued by debt write-offs running into tens of billions of shillings, distorted the market further while private mills exercised local buyer power. Coffee and tea auctions display concentrated purchasing. At the Nairobi Coffee Exchange, a handful of dealers routinely command the overwhelming majority of purchases. Tea auctions at Mombasa have long shown top buyers capturing large shares of volume. Studies of agricultural traders in related markets show them capturing as much as four-fifths of total surplus while producers and final consumers share the remainder. The pattern is ancient and modern at once: colonial marketing boards once stood as official monopsonists; today's private and hybrid structures achieve similar results without the colonial flag.

History sharpens the condemnation. The 1989 Restrictive Trade Practices, Monopolies and Price Control Act focused almost exclusively on seller-side concentration and price controls. The 2010 Competition Act modernized the framework and created an independent Authority. Only after successive retail collapses Nakumatt, Uchumi and after a 2017

retail-sector inquiry documented listing fees, delayed payments, and risk-shifting did Parliament fortify the buyer-power provisions. The law recognised the problem. Practice lagged. Abuse-of-dominance cases against sellers remain cautious; formal findings of dominance are rare even where market shares scream concentration. Buyer-power cases, while more numerous, still arrive after damage has been done, after suppliers have already financed the buyer's working capital through unpaid invoices, after small firms have closed or survived on thinner margins.

The correlation is brutal. Where sellers hold power, consumers feel the sting immediately in higher prices. Where buyers hold power, producers feel the slow bleed of suppressed incomes, delayed cash flow, and existential uncertainty. Both injuries reduce output, stifle investment, and concentrate economic opportunity. Both erode the promise of shared prosperity that the Authority's own vision statement proclaims. Treating them as unequal threats is not neutral policy. It is a choice that privileges the downstream aggregator over the upstream creator.

Literary irony saturates the landscape. The same regulatory eye that can detect coordinated steel pricing through private messages appears slower to detect the systematic transfer of risk from a hypermarket's balance sheet onto a yoghurt manufacturer's. The same statute that defines dominance with percentage

thresholds defines buyer power more flexibly, recognising economic dependence even without formal dominance. Yet the energy of enforcement still tilts toward the visible price increase rather than the invisible price suppression. The giant who sells dear is hunted with drums. The giant who buys cheap is admonished with guidelines and occasional, if growing, fines.

This is not an argument against strong monopoly enforcement. Cartels and dominant sellers who exploit consumers deserve every tool the law provides. It is an argument against selective vision. Monopsony is not a lesser cousin of monopoly. It is its mirror image, equally capable of distorting allocation, extracting rents, and crushing the weak. In a country where most enterprises are small and most workers depend on them, buyer power is not a technical curiosity. It is a daily tax on enterprise and a quiet engine of inequality.

What must change is categorical. The Competition Authority must treat buyer-power investigations with the same investigative aggression and resource priority given to cartels. Sector regulators in agriculture sugar, coffee, tea must coordinate rather than operate in parallel silos that allow catchment rules and auction concentrations to persist unchallenged. Parliament should resist any dilution of Section 24A and instead demand periodic public reporting on recovery of delayed payments and the survival rates of affected suppliers. Large buyers themselves, whether retailers, processors, or insurers, must internalize that superior bargaining position is not a licence for extraction. Codes of practice are useful only when backed by credible sanctions. Courts and the Competition Tribunal have begun to give the provision teeth; they must continue.

Kenya's markets will not become efficient by accident. They will become efficient when the law regards every form of concentrated power seller or buyer as a potential threat to the same constitutional values of equity and economic justice. The farmer who delivers cane, the processor who supplies yoghurt, the garage that repairs insured vehicles, the small manufacturer who lists goods on supermarket shelves: these are not peripheral actors. They are the productive core. When the buyer whispers and the law only half-listens, that core weakens. The time for selective hearing has ended. The time for even-handed, relentless enforcement has arrived.

The writer is a social commentator

TSC One of the defining features of Mitei’s tenure has been the emphasis on engagement. The relationship between teachers and their employer is regularly tested by disputes

How Mitei has steadied the ship at TSC

Fourteen months into her acting role, Teachers Service Commission CEO Eveleen Mitei has kept a restless profession engaged — but the harder test lies ahead

BY Ashford Kimani
@themkenyentimes

Five days from today, Eveleen Mitei will mark 14 months as acting Chief Executive Officer of the Teachers Service Commission. That so few people remember she is still in an acting capacity is itself a measure of the relative calm she has brought to an institution that has historically been a flashpoint for teacher grievances.

When Dr Mitei assumed the role in June 2025, she inherited a commission carrying enormous expectations. Teachers wanted answers on career stagnation, promotions, medical cover, staffing shortages and the implementation of education reforms. The commission simultaneously needed to maintain stability while responding to a sector undergoing significant change. More than a year later, there are developments worth examining.

One of the defining features of Mitei’s tenure has been the emphasis on engagement. The relationship between teachers and their employer is regularly tested by disputes over remuneration, promotions and professional welfare. An effective commission must do more than issue circulars and enforce regulations — it must listen, consult and create genuine space for teachers to raise concerns. Dialogue has emerged as a central feature of her approach.

A particularly significant moment came on 13 September 2025, when more than 10,000 teachers gathered at State House, Nairobi, for the Walimu na Rais forum. Led by representatives of KNUT, KUPPET, KUSNET, KEPSHA and KESSHA, the teachers met President William Ruto in a direct engagement that placed professional concerns before the country’s top leadership. Issues sur-



Eveleen Mitei CEO TSC

rounding career advancement, remuneration, housing and welfare received national attention in a setting that went beyond the formal correspondence and industrial action that has historically defined the profession’s relationship with government.

The challenge, of course, is translating dialogue into results. A gathering, however historic, cannot by itself resolve career stagnation or improve working conditions. Its lasting value depends entirely on whether commitments are honoured and whether teachers experience tangible change. Mitei’s stewardship will be judged in large part by how effectively the commission follows through on matters within its mandate and works with relevant government agencies on those that require broader intervention.

A further milestone was the national World Teachers’ Day celebration held at Kasarani Gymnasium on 5 October 2026, attended by President Ruto. The event marked 60 years since the adoption of the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, held under the theme: “Standing with teachers: 60 years of protecting the profession, advancing its status and shaping our futures.” The occasion celebrated educators not merely

as public servants but as professionals whose work shapes Kenya’s social and economic trajectory.

The commission’s decision to honour outstanding teachers through a formal Roll of Honour was particularly noteworthy. The recognition programme highlighted educators who had gone beyond routine classroom responsibilities — excelling in school leadership, inclusive education, learner protection, mentorship, innovation and talent development. Nominations went through eligibility checks and assessment of supporting evidence, giving visibility to professionals whose dedication might otherwise pass unnoticed outside their immediate school communities.

For an institution managing hundreds of thousands of educators, recognition matters. Teachers spend years preparing learners for examinations, mentoring young people and supporting families, much of it away from any public spotlight. A system that celebrates outstanding performance sends a clear message that commitment deserves appreciation. The Kasarani event, with the President in attendance, elevated that message to the national stage.

During the celebrations, Mitei acknowledged govern-

ment and parliamentary sup-

port for teacher recruitment and promotion funding. Pres-

ident Ruto announced plans to increase the number of promotions in the 2026/2027 financial year from 34,016 advertised opportunities to 50,000, with additional funding committed to the exercise. The announcement addressed one of the profession’s most persistent concerns: the slow pace of career progression.

Teacher welfare has also remained central to the commission’s agenda. The transition to the Mwalimu Comprehensive Medical Cover under the Social Health Authority has required careful coordination among government, TSC and healthcare providers. Its effectiveness will ultimately be measured by teachers’ actual experiences — access to fa-

cilities, reliability of services and resolution of outstanding administrative difficulties.

Steadying the ship at TSC is about more than surviving difficult moments. It requires building trust, strengthening communication, recognising professional excellence and ensuring policies produce measurable benefits for teachers and learners alike. The State House forum and the Kasarani celebration stand out as occasions that brought teachers into meaningful national engagement.

Mitei’s tenure should be assessed against both the progress made and the work that remains. Teachers need fair promotions, reliable medical services, adequate staffing and responsive administration throughout the year — not only on World Teachers’ Day. Recognition and dialogue provide a foundation. Consistent implementation is what will determine whether the ship has truly been steadied.

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Uganda These contrasting experiences have shaped public perceptions of an industry that continues to play an important role in Uganda's financial ecosystem.

Let's not throw out the baby with the bathwater: Why responsible digital lending still matters



BY Daniel Tusiimukye K'abaasa

@themtkenyentimes

Few developments in financial services have generated as much public debate in recent years as digital lending. For some Ugandans, mobile loan applications have provided a convenient source of emergency funds, working capital and financial support when traditional financing was out of reach. For others, the experience has involved excessive charges, aggressive debt collection, threats and concerns over the misuse of personal information.

These contrasting experiences have shaped public perceptions of an industry that continues to play an important role in Uganda's financial ecosystem.

For a small business owner who needs to restock a shop, a farmer preparing for a planting season or a trader facing an unexpected expense, timely credit can make a meaningful difference. Yet traditional financial institutions often require formal financial records, conventional collateral or proof of stable income, conditions that many informal businesses and low-income earners struggle to meet.

While concerns surrounding digital lending must be addressed, they should not overshadow the role responsible providers can play in expanding access to finance. The answer to misconduct is not to dismiss an entire industry, but to hold offenders accountable while supporting practices that serve borrowers fairly.

Bad eggs among the good

The concerns surrounding digital lending are serious. Reports of hidden charges, unclear loan terms, excessive interest, harassment during debt recovery and the misuse of personal data have undermined public confidence in some lending plat-



For some Ugandans, mobile loan applications have provided a convenient source of emergency funds, working capital and financial support when traditional financing was out of reach.

forms.

In Uganda, the Microfinance Regulation Department under the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development introduced Digital Lending Guidelines in 2024 in response to concerns about predatory app-based lending and unethical practices. The guidelines address licensing, governance, credit assessment, customer information, loan recovery and consumer protection.

The introduction of these measures reflects an important distinction: the problem is not simply the existence of digital credit, but how it is provided and whether lenders operate within the law. A lender that clearly explains the total cost of borrowing, assesses a customer's ability to repay, protects personal information and follows fair debt collection procedures operates differently from one that conceals charges or intimidates borrowers.

Treating both as though they represent the same standard of practice risks overlooking the institutions making efforts to build trust and operate responsibly. At the same time, the benefits of digital lending should never be used to excuse abuse. Customers deserve transparent pricing, fair treatment and effective channels for resolving complaints. Lenders that engage in unlawful or harmful practices must be held accountable.

The goal should be a market where responsible providers can thrive and irresponsible actors cannot hide be-

hind the industry's broader contribution to financial inclusion.

The other side of digital lending

Digital lending uses mobile technology, digital transactions and other relevant data to assess borrowers and deliver credit through accessible platforms. These services can reach customers who might otherwise struggle to obtain financing while reducing some of the administrative requirements associated with conventional lending.

According to a 2026 analysis by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), only about 9–10 per cent of Uganda's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have a formal loan or line of credit. The estimated MSME financing gap stands at UGX31.4 trillion, highlighting the need for alternative approaches to financing businesses and underserved communities.

A responsibly structured digital loan can help a trader purchase stock, a farmer acquire agricultural inputs or a small enterprise manage a temporary cash-flow shortage. For businesses operating on tight margins, timely financing can make the difference between fulfilling an order and losing an opportunity. Individuals can also use suitable credit to manage unexpected expenses when savings are insufficient.

The value of digital lending, therefore, goes beyond the convenience

of borrowing through a phone. It lies in whether access to credit helps people manage financial needs, sustain livelihoods and pursue productive opportunities.

Reaching those traditional finance often leaves behind

Financial inclusion involves more than owning a bank account or using mobile money. It also means accessing appropriate financial products on terms that customers can understand and manage.

Women entrepreneurs, young people, rural traders and smallholder farmers may operate viable businesses without the formal records or assets required by conventional lenders. Digital platforms can help bridge this gap by using transaction histories and other relevant information to assess creditworthiness, subject to appropriate consent and data protection safeguards.

Remote applications, quicker decisions and reduced travel costs can also make borrowing more accessible, particularly for people living far from financial institutions. However, easier access must not encourage borrowing without considering repayment capacity. Financial inclusion is meaningful when customers can use financial services to improve their circumstances without becoming trapped in unsustainable debt.

Addressing the bad practices

The concerns surrounding digital lending are serious and should not be minimised. Hidden charges, unclear loan terms, excessive interest, harassment during debt recovery and misuse of personal data can worsen borrowers' financial difficulties and undermine confidence in formal financial services.

Uganda's digital lending regulatory framework, including the Digital Lending Guidelines introduced in 2024, seeks to address concerns around digital credit provision and consumer protection.

Not all digital lenders operate in the same way. A provider that communicates borrowing costs transparently, assesses a customer's ability to repay, protects personal information and follows fair debt collection

procedures operates differently from one that conceals charges or intimidates borrowers.

Recognising these differences does not excuse misconduct. Borrowers deserve transparent pricing, fair treatment and effective channels for resolving complaints. Lenders that engage in unlawful or harmful practices must be held accountable.

The objective should be to create a market in which responsible providers can thrive while those that exploit borrowers face appropriate consequences. Consumer protection and financial innovation are not competing priorities; both are necessary for a sustainable digital credit ecosystem.

Building responsibility through collaboration

A sustainable digital lending market requires engagement among lenders, regulators, policymakers, consumer protection organisations and the public.

Digital lenders must review their practices, listen to customer concerns and improve their products. Regulators must provide clear rules, supervise compliance and act against misconduct. Industry associations can encourage shared standards and accountability, while financial education can help borrowers understand interest rates, fees, repayment schedules and the consequences of default.

An important industry initiative in this regard is the Industry Code of Conduct for Responsible Digital Lending in Uganda, launched in November 2025 by the Financial Technologies Service Providers Association (FITSPA), in partnership with UNCDF.

The Code promotes transparent loan terms, responsible credit assessment, data protection, fair debt collection and effective complaints handling. It complements the existing legal and regulatory framework while establishing expectations for participating lenders.

At the 8th FITSPA Annual Fintech Conference, held at the Sheraton Kampala Hotel on October 6 and 7, 2026, FITSPA and UNCDF recognised eight responsible digital lenders that had subscribed to the Code: Furaha Financial, Zenka Finance, Fido, Unifi, M-KOPA, Flow Global, JUMO and Numida.

The recognition highlighted industry efforts to promote responsible lending and strengthen confidence in digital financial services. However,



Students bear the brunt of Kenya’s public university crisis

By Finnessy Okello

Kenya’s public universities are cracking, and it is students who are absorbing the damage. Strikes, missing examination marks, delayed graduations and dysfunctional administrative offices have turned what should be a transformative academic journey into a prolonged exercise in frustration — and nobody in authority appears sufficiently alarmed.

When lecturers down tools, students do not stop paying rent, transport costs or loan repayments. Academic calendars collapse, examinations are postponed and course completion dates stretch indefinitely. For students from low-income families, every additional month at university is a financial crisis, not merely an inconvenience.

The examination system compounds the problem. Students wait months for results, often



without any communication on timelines. Missing marks block registration for subsequent units, delay graduation and disrupt employment plans. The situation worsens where part-time lecturers — relied upon heavily to plug staffing gaps — withhold results following payment disputes. Students who completed their coursework find themselves penalised for an institutional failure entirely beyond their control.

Administrative offices, which exist to resolve such difficulties, frequently make things

worse. Students seeking clarity on fee balances or missing marks are sent from office to office, spending time and money on visits that yield nothing.

University management and government cannot treat these failures as routine. Lecturers must be paid on time, administrative systems must function and examination records must be protected regardless of employment disputes. Public universities were built to open doors. Right now, too many remain firmly shut.

Utumishi murder case shifts as accused children weigh plea bargains

By Yvonne Wambui

The murder case arising from the Utumishi Girls Academy fire tragedy has taken a significant turn, with two of the eight accused children now in plea bargain negotiations with the prosecution — a development that could reshape the proceedings entirely.

Kibera Law Courts on Monday allowed the negotiations to proceed after the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions confirmed receipt of a formal plea bargain request involving one accused child, identified in court as Subject 3. State counsel told the court that preliminary discussions had already taken place but further consultations were required before negotiations could advance.

A second defence lawyer confirmed a similar request had been submitted to the ODPP on behalf of another accused child, seeking enhanced visits to facilitate consultations be-



tween the child, legal team and parents. Remaining defence lawyers said they were still consulting their clients before deciding whether to pursue comparable agreements.

Trial Judge Diana Kavedza allowed discussions to continue and directed that parents of all accused children receive two enhanced visits per month, coordinated with the institution holding the minors. The court ordered fortnightly mentions to monitor progress, with the next date set for November 11.

The court also heard that the accused children were con-

tinuing their education and were expected to sit examinations the following week. Children’s officer Hilda Mbatha confirmed attendance was in line with earlier court directions, and Kavedza ordered that schooling continue uninterrupted.

The case stems from a fire at Utumishi Girls Academy in Gilgil, Nakuru County, in which 16 students died. Whether plea agreements materialise will determine how — and how quickly — justice is delivered.

Uganda These contrasting experiences have shaped public perceptions of an industry that continues to play an important role in Uganda’s financial ecosystem.

Let’s not throw out the baby with the bathwater: Why responsible digital lending still matters

Contd from page 20

subscribing to a code of conduct is only a starting point. Its value depends on whether lenders apply its principles in their daily operations, from assessing repayment capacity to protecting customer information and resolving complaints.

Industry commitments must therefore be supported by effective supervision, accountability and continued engagement with borrowers.

Credit must support productive economic activity

As Uganda pursues its Tenfold Growth Strategy, which aims to expand the economy to US\$500 billion by 2040, access to appropriate financing remains important for enterprise development, investment and job creation.

Digital lenders can contribute by developing products that support productive activities rather than focusing solely on the number of loans disbursed. Credit that helps a trader expand stock, a farmer invest in production or a small enterprise fulfil a contract can support employment, strengthen supply chains and stimulate economic activity.

This requires lenders to consider whether their products suit the customers they serve. Loan amounts, pricing and repayment schedules should reflect borrowers’ circumstances, and credit assessments should help prevent customers from taking on obligations they cannot reasonably meet.

More lending does not automatically mean greater financial inclusion. The goal should be to expand access to useful financial services while protecting customers from unsustainable debt.

Responsible practices can also

strengthen the industry’s long-term sustainability. Transparent terms, fair treatment and effective complaints resolution help build trust and maintain customer relationships.

Preserving the good while confronting the bad

Uganda’s digital lending industry faces a defining challenge: responding to legitimate public concerns without losing sight of the financial needs that make digital credit valuable.

The experiences of borrowers who have suffered harassment, hidden charges or unfair treatment must inform stronger safeguards and enforcement. Equally, the potential of responsible lenders to serve small businesses, reach underserved communities and provide timely financing deserves recognition.

The way forward is not to choose between consumer protection and



For some Ugandans, mobile loan applications have provided a convenient source of emergency funds, working capital and financial support when traditional financing was out of reach.

financial innovation. Uganda needs both.

That means enforcing regulations, strengthening industry standards, improving financial literacy, encouraging responsible product development and ensuring borrowers have effective ways to seek redress. It also means assessing lenders by their conduct, transparency and treatment of customers rather than allowing the actions of a few to define the entire industry.

Digital lending is not without its

challenges, and it should never be beyond scrutiny. But neither should its potential be discarded because some providers have failed to uphold the standards expected of them.

Let us hold bad actors accountable, support responsible innovation and preserve the opportunity for digital lending to work for the people and businesses that need it most.

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BREAKING NEWS

Sports >> *Arsenal and England winger uses global football platform to champion child healthcare charity Big Shoe

Saka dedicates Sócrates Award to Rwandan boy who regained his sight

By Pascal Okoth

Bukayo Saka yesterday received the 2026 Sócrates Award and used the occasion to shine a light on the story of a 14-year-old Rwandan boy whose eyesight was restored through charitable medical intervention, delivering one of the most emotionally charged speeches of the evening.

The Arsenal and England winger dedicated the honour to the children supported by Big Shoe, an organisation that provides vulnerable young people with access to essential medical care. At the centre of his address was Biringiro, a teenager from a rural Rwandan village who began losing his sight at the age of 12.

"When I was 12, I started losing my sight. My village has no electricity and as my eyesight got worse, even moving around my home became difficult," Biringiro said in a message Saka read to the audience.

Living without electricity compounded the boy's deteriorating vision, making routine daily activities increasingly dangerous and isolating him from normal childhood experiences. The situation continued to worsen until Big Shoe intervened, providing the eye care he needed to restore his sight.

"Thanks to Big Shoe, I received the eye care that I needed. Today, I can read the blackboard even from the back of the classroom," Biringiro said. "I can enjoy being a child again. For the first time in a long time, I'm excited about my future. I want to become an English teacher one day."

The message drew an audible response from the audience, with Biringiro's ambition to teach English illustrating in concrete terms how access to basic healthcare can reshape a child's educational prospects and long-term confidence.

Saka, reflecting on what drives his charitable work, spoke about



Bukayo Saka

the particular joy football brings to children and the responsibility he feels to extend that experience to others. "We know how it feels to be a child and having a ball at your feet and how much joy you have," he said. "Every time I have the opportunity to help another kid have that feeling again, that's important to me."

He closed his speech by directing his gratitude away from himself. "It's an honour to be here,

and it's an honour to receive this award. On behalf of all the children we've been able to help, thank you," he said.

The Sócrates Award, named after the Brazilian football legend and physician-activist Sócrates, recognises professional footballers who have made a significant contribution to social and charitable causes. Saka's win acknowledged not only his support for Big Shoe but also his broader

commitment to using his platform constructively.

For Biringiro, restored vision has meant a return to the classroom, to his peers and to the simple freedoms of childhood. For Saka, the award marked something beyond sporting recognition — confirmation that the reach of a footballer's influence extends well past the final whistle.

GET THE BEST OF WORLD

Sports >> *The Bayern Munich and England striker claimed football’s most prestigious individual prize at the London Palladium after scoring 73 goals

Kane ends England’s 25-year Ballon d’Or wait with record-breaking Bayern season

By Andalo Christine Ingutia

Harry Kane yesterday claimed the 2026 Men’s Ballon d’Or at the London Palladium, ending a 25-year wait for an English winner and capping a season in which he scored 73 goals for Bayern Munich and England — a total that left voters with little reason to look elsewhere.

The 33-year-old striker became the first Englishman to win football’s most prestigious individual award since Michael Owen claimed the prize in 2001. For Kane, it represented the culmination of years of consistency, determination and a relentless pursuit of excellence that had long marked him as one of the finest strikers of his generation.

Kane’s season at Bayern Munich was defined by an extraordinary goal-scoring output that drove the German club’s attack throughout the campaign. His 73-goal total was not simply a statistical achievement — it reflected his ability to combine clinical finishing with intelligent movement and an instinctive understanding of how to create space for teammates. Having already collected the Gerd Müller Trophy earlier in the evening for the world’s top scorer, he completed a memorable night by lifting the Ballon d’Or itself.

The victory carried particular resonance given Kane’s earlier career. During his years at Tottenham Hotspur, he had been widely regarded as one of football’s finest strikers yet struggled to convert personal brilliance into major team honours. That chapter drew persistent scrutiny from critics who questioned whether he could ever claim the game’s biggest individual prize. His performances this season settled that debate decisively.

Real Madrid forward Kylian Mbappé finished second after a strong campaign of his own. The French international enjoyed an



Harry Kane

impressive season in a star-studded Madrid side but was unable to match Kane’s level of individual dominance or his contribution to team trophies. The debate over whether individual performance or collective success should carry greater weight in Ballon d’Or voting had long divided opinion — Kane’s season rendered it largely irrelevant. Barcelona’s Lamine Yamal finished third, continuing his emergence as one of the most exciting talents in world football. At 19, the winger delivered another campaign of remarkable confidence, creativity and maturity,

and his podium finish suggested a future Ballon d’Or challenge is a matter of when rather than if. Manchester City midfielder Rodri also featured among the leading contenders. Widely regarded as one of the finest midfielders in the game, the Spaniard’s intelligence, range of passing and match control remained qualities of the highest order. Kane’s goals and team trophies, however, proved the decisive factor. Elsewhere in the ceremony, Barcelona’s Alexia Putellas claimed her third Women’s Ballon d’Or, while Yamal collected the Kopa Trophy for the best young play-

er. Paris Saint-Germain were named Men’s Club of the Year, and Spain coach Luis de la Fuente received the Men’s Coach of the Year award. The decision to hold the ceremony in London lent the occasion a particular resonance, allowing English football to celebrate one of its greatest modern strikers on home soil. As the evening drew to a close, Kane stood at the podium with the golden ball in hand — a striker who had spent years chasing the game’s highest individual honour finally holding it.

SPORTS NEWS



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The strategic importance of social work in preventing harmful habits among young people



By: Karimova Marjona Faxriddin
@themkenyatimes



Worth Noting:

- At this stage, social workers strive to create a healthy environment for all young people. The main focus is on strengthening their “social immunity.” This includes “Life Skills” training sessions conducted in schools and communities. The goal is to develop young people’s ability to say “No!” to harmful offers.
- At this stage, targeted work is carried out with “at-risk groups,” including children from troubled families and adolescents prone to delinquency. Here, the social worker performs a diagnostic role: identifying problems at an early stage and helping adolescents overcome depression or aggression.
- This is the stage of returning young people who have developed harmful habits to society (resocialization). It is the most complex process, requiring not only medical treatment but also social rehabilitation.¹ Social workers help clients make new friends, acquire professional skills, and restore relationships with their families.

This article analyzes the causes of the spread of harmful habits among young people in the context of globalization, their socio-psychological consequences, and modern approaches to social work practice in addressing these problems. The article provides an in-depth examination of the role of social workers in preventing deviant behavior, the advantages of the case management system, and social rehabilitation processes.

Keywords: Social work, youth policy, harmful habits, deviant behavior, prevention, case management, resocialization, “Inson” Centers, social therapy, risk group.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, young people are considered the most dynamic segment of society, but at the same time, they are among the most vulnerable to external influences. The rapid development of information technologies and intercultural integration have broadened young people’s worldviews while also increasing the number of factors that negatively affect their minds. Harmful habits such as drug addiction, alcoholism, tobacco use, as well as internet addiction and “ludomania” (gambling), which have become increasingly relevant in recent years, pose a serious threat to the intellectual and physical potential of the younger generation.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, protecting young people’s rights and ensuring their healthy development are priority areas of state policy. In this regard, the activities of social work specialists are aimed not merely at prohibiting harmful habits but at identifying their root causes and applying scientifically grounded preventive mechanisms.

MAIN BODY

1. SOCIAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF HARMFUL HABITS

In social work theory, harmful habits among young people are of-

ten viewed as a consequence of an imbalance between individuals and their social environment. Research indicates that the problem may originate from the following chain of factors:

- Microenvironment (Family): Emotional coldness within the family, insufficient parental supervision or excessive pressure, and social orphanhood.
- Mesosystem (Peers): “Group identification” — an adolescent’s imitation of harmful habits practiced by friends in order to gain acceptance and establish their identity within the group.
- Macroenvironment (Society): Socio-economic problems, the lack of systematic organization of leisure activities, and covert advertising of harmful substances.

2. STAGES OF SOCIAL WORK PREVENTION

Social workers implement three main levels of strategies in combating harmful habits among young people.¹

A. Universal (Primary) Prevention

At this stage, social workers strive to create a healthy environment for all young people. The main focus is on strengthening their “social immunity.” This includes “Life Skills” training sessions conducted in schools and communities. The goal is to develop young people’s ability to say “No!” to harmful offers.

B. Selective (Secondary) Prevention

At this stage, targeted work is carried out with “at-risk groups,” including children from troubled families and adolescents prone to delinquency. Here, the social worker performs a diagnostic role: identifying problems at an early stage and helping adolescents overcome depression or aggression.

C. Indicated (Tertiary) Prevention and Rehabilitation



Child Welfare Social Work

This is the stage of returning young people who have developed harmful habits to society (resocialization). It is the most complex process, requiring not only medical treatment but also social rehabilitation.¹ Social workers help clients make new friends, acquire professional skills, and restore relationships with their families.

3. CASE MANAGEMENT AS AN EFFECTIVE METHOD

Today, the case management approach is widely used in the “Inson” Social Services Centers established in Uzbekistan. When working with young people affected by harmful habits, this method involves the following steps:

- Assessment: A comprehensive examination of the client’s problems, including medical, psychological, and social aspects.
- Planning: Developing an individual assistance plan.
- Coordination: Organizing comprehensive support in cooperation with psychologists, legal specialists, doctors, and educational institutions.
- Monitoring: Continuously monitoring the outcomes.

The following measures are pro-

posed to strengthen the prevention of harmful habits among young people:

1. Social Innovations: Expanding “Social Volunteering” centers in communities to engage young people in socially beneficial activities.²
2. Cyber Social Work: Creating specialized online platforms to improve digital culture and media literacy among young people and prevent internet addiction.
3. Strengthening Family-School Cooperation: Organizing “Social Pedagogy” courses for parents, since prevention begins within the family.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, social work in preventing harmful habits among young people is not merely about providing assistance; it is the art of changing an individual’s life. Through professional knowledge and human empathy, social workers help young people turn away from destructive paths and find a worthy place in society. Young people who choose a healthy lifestyle serve as the foundation of a strong and stable state.

Karimova Marjona Faxriddin is a second-Year Student of Social Work, Termez State University, Termez, Uzbekistan