

Implementation in Kenya:



In partnership with:



Insight Paper

Biashara Pawa Dialogue in Nakuru County

The Strategic Imperative to Strengthen Inclusive Entrepreneurship in Nakuru



Published on: 20th May 2026
Event held on: 28th August 2025
Venue: NakuruBox, Nakuru County

For inquiries:
☎ +254 715 322 573
✉ susan@nakurubox.co.ke

Funded by:



Implementing partners in Kenya:





Executive Summary

Kenya is one of the most entrepreneurial economies in the world, with surveys showing that 93% of Kenyan women are considering starting or already running a business, far above the regional average across Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. And while women and youth constitute a staggering 70% of the population, they remain largely confined to informal, low-yield micro-enterprises. The findings from the Biashara Pawa dialogue confirm that Nakuru's long-term economic resilience depends on enabling women and youth to transition from survival-oriented microenterprises into higher-growth sectors such as manufacturing, technology, and the green economy.

This is not merely a social goal but a fundamental requirement for achieving the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) 2023–2027. These challenges reflect a broader national trend. Across Kenya, a large share of youth depend on informal work while struggling to access formal economic opportunities due to gaps in skills, infrastructure, and capital.

The strategic opportunity, therefore, lies in shifting the development approach. Traditional aid-based interventions alone are no longer sufficient.

The future of inclusive entrepreneurship will depend on ecosystem-led solutions through collaboration between government, entrepreneurial support organisations, financial institutions, and the private sector. By moving beyond fragmented interventions toward a cohesive, supportive environment, we can transform Nakuru's entrepreneurial market into a benchmark for regional inclusive prosperity.

The Competitive Potential of Youth and Women

The strategic transformation of Nakuru County is inextricably linked to its demographic composition. According to the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) 2023–2027, 32.4% of the county's population consists of youth aged 18 to 34. This segment, combined with the economic agency of women, represents the primary engine for the county's industrialized future. However, a comprehensive analysis of challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs reveals a stark disconnect. While these groups drive the informal economy, they remain conspicuously absent from the high-growth sectors, like technology, infrastructure development, manufacturing, financial services, the blue economy, and the green and circular economy.

These sectors require technical capabilities, access to capital, and structured market linkages that many early-stage entrepreneurs struggle to secure. Besides, structural barriers such as limited access to affordable finance discourage participation in traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering and infrastructure development. From a financial perspective, the case for inclusion is absolute. Global evidence consistently shows that supporting women and youth entrepreneurship strengthens economic resilience and accelerates inclusive growth.

For instance, according to the World Bank, women reinvest up to 90% of their income back into their families and communities, creating a multiplier effect that bolsters local stability. Youth-led enterprises, on the other hand, often demonstrate higher adoption of digital technologies and innovative business models, enabling them to respond more quickly to changing market conditions. By intentionally pivoting support toward these groups within crucial sector like the green and circular sectors, we do not just fill a quota but also cultivate a more diverse, resilient, and innovative corporate ecosystem that can withstand the volatilities of the global market.

This video showcasing an emerging woman entrepreneur and Biashara Pawa role model is an example of the strategic value of the Biashara Pawa initiative in promoting inclusive growth across these underrepresented sectors.



Core Barriers Limiting Entrepreneurial Growth in Nakuru

The transition from micro-scale operations to competitive industrial participation is obstructed by a series of deep-rooted systemic barriers as cleared across the discussions. To meet the objectives of the [CIDP 2023–2027](#), the following barriers must be addressed:

- Limited access to finance.** Finance is the primary cross-cutting constraint. Data shows that [access to credit remains one of the most significant constraints](#) for MSMEs, despite the sector contributing roughly [33% of Kenya's GDP](#). This is exacerbated by low financial literacy and limited awareness of diverse funding instruments.
- Institutional skills gap.** A profound [mismatch exists between TVET/University curricula and the technical demands](#) of manufacturing and tech sectors. This misalignment results in a shortage of market-ready talent despite high graduation rates.
- Policy-to-action issues.** Entrepreneurs often feel excluded from the room during policy design. Furthermore, the lack of policy translation into local languages prevents grassroots businesses from navigating regulatory requirements or accessing available state support.
- Market and logistics inefficiencies.** Over-dependence on exploitative middlemen and unstructured supply chains severely erodes profit margins. High operational costs, specifically expensive electricity and poor rural road networks, further inflate the cost of production.
- Technological stagnation.** Adoption of digital tools is slowed by high tariffs on equipment and a lack of technical exposure. In specialized sectors, language barriers and a shortage of personnel trained in modern innovation further widen the digital divide.



Strategic Solutions for a Stronger Entrepreneurial Environment

Local government documents provide insights into economic planning, demographic statistics, and specific initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive entrepreneurship. To bridge the gap between marginal survival and industrial competitiveness, Nakuru County must transition toward a structured, ecosystem-led support framework. This requires the following considerations:

- **Alternative Financing Vehicles**

The BiasharaPawa dialogue underscored that traditional banking often fails those at the seed stage due to rigid collateral demands and high interest rates. To counter this, stakeholders are increasingly advocating for collective financing structures such as the chama model, a communal savings approach where collective credit-rating reduces the risk profile of individual entrepreneurs. Furthermore, innovative financing tools like Widya offer a powerful alternative through crowdfunding, allowing entrepreneurs in sectors like WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) and manufacturing to bypass traditional barriers. These platforms reduce dependence on conventional lenders while enabling entrepreneurs to access seed capital at earlier stages of business development. When combined with financial literacy training and structured governance within groups, such models can strengthen creditworthiness and unlock larger institutional funding over time.

- **Strengthening Entrepreneurial Support Systems**

Entrepreneurial Support Organisations (ESOs), such as [NakuruBox](#), serve as the critical connection between grassroots ventures and institutional investors. These hubs provide essential Business Development Services (BDS), ranging from business incubation programs to market-ready validation. By fostering mentorship and demonstration environments, ESOs enable entrepreneurs to learn from role models and industry experts who have successfully handled the local regulatory and financial challenges.

- **Taking Advantage of Digital Platforms and Technology**

Digital capability is increasingly essential for business growth. Entrepreneurs understand the importance of digital marketing, online learning resources, and technology-enabled business models in expanding market reach and improving operational efficiency. Many entrepreneurs are already using social media platforms to market products and access informal training resources. However, structured training programmes and improved access to digital infrastructure would significantly accelerate technology adoption as well as help businesses compete in both domestic and regional markets.

Simultaneously, the green and [circular economy](#) presents a rapidly expanding opportunity for commercialization. By incentivizing the circular economy, specifically through the fast-tracking of certifications for recycled products and policies encouraging manufacturers to take responsibility for packaging recovery, entrepreneurs can transform waste into a competitive asset, such as biodegradable packaging, upcycled fashion, plastic-derived raw materials, and community recycling hubs. With appropriate policy support and market incentives, circular economy enterprises could generate both environmental and economic value.

- **Expanding Market Access and Collaboration**

The future of Nakuru's competitiveness lies in cooperatives and collective business models. These structures allow small-scale manufacturers and farmers to negotiate better prices and lobby for supportive policies with a unified voice. Strategic collaboration between industry leaders and TVET institutions is also vital to align curricula with actual industrial needs, ensuring that the labor force is equipped for the 21st-century economy. Through regular trade fairs and standardized material quality via agencies like the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS), we can ensure that local products meet both regional and global standards.

- **Unlocking Sustainability and Green Economy Opportunities**

The potential of climate-smart agriculture, recycling enterprises, and sustainable production practices is highlighted to drive new economic activity.

Access to climate finance and sustainability-focused investment could further accelerate this transition. By aligning entrepreneurship support with environmental sustainability, Nakuru County can position itself as a leader in inclusive and resilient economic development while opening new avenues for innovation and growth.



Recommendations to Strengthen the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

To achieve the goals of the CIDP 2023–2027, the following strategic priorities must be adopted by the architects of the county's economic future.

For the County Government

- Establish Special Industrial Zones offering preferential Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) costs and infrastructure support.
- Standardize production materials via the KEBS to reduce market entry barriers.
- Simplify public funding mechanisms to improve financial access and strengthen rural market systems.
- Democratize policy design through participatory processes and translation into local languages to ensure grassroots adoption.

For the Development Partners and Investors

- Fund Skills-on-Demand mentorship and sustainability-focused incubation programs.
- Bridge the valley for early-stage ventures by supporting ESOs like [NakuruBox](#).
- Expand climate-smart agricultural extension services to address climate variability.
- Align educational outputs with industrial technical requirements to enhance workforce readiness.

For the Private Sector

- Create direct curriculum liaisons with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions to resolve labour skill gaps.
- Adopt digital tools to enhance operational efficiency and market reach.
- Form strategic cooperatives to strengthen bargaining power and collective resilience.
- Prioritize continuous innovation and peer-to-peer learning to drive internal market excellence.



The Role of BiasharaPawa in Bridging These Gaps

The BiasharaPawa initiative, which is a Swahili expression for the power of business, functions as a strategic catalyst within Nakuru's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

While other interventions often focus on broad-based aid, BiasharaPawa distinguishes itself through its targeted approach to solving systemic challenges for women and youth in under-represented sectors. BiasharaPawa moves beyond theoretical support to provide practical, sector-specific relief:

- **Dismantling financial barriers** - Instead of traditional, high-collateral lending, the initiative creates visibility for alternative financing approaches, including cooperatives and emerging digital funding models, helping entrepreneurs navigate beyond traditional credit barriers.
- **Bridging the skills mismatch** - Unlike generic training programs, it fosters direct collaboration between industry leaders and TVET institutions to ensure academic curricula align with actual industrial technical requirements.
- **Institutional inclusion** - It actively brings entrepreneurs with high-level policymakers, such as County Executive Committee Members (CECMs), to address the persistent issue of limited participation in policy design. Its emphasis on mentorship, peer learning, and exposure to role models responds to the clear demand for skills development and practical business support.

What separates BiasharaPawa from standard initiatives is its focus on sectoral depth and peer networking as well as ecosystem-led approach anchored in local ownership. By organizing dialogue around eight specific industries, it addresses the unique friction points of each. Furthermore, it leverages local Entrepreneurial Support Organisations (ESOs) like NakuruBox to provide localized, continuous mentorship rather than one-off workshops, ensuring a self-sustaining cycle of innovation and economic resilience.



The Role of BiasharaPawa in Bridging These Gaps

The BiasharaPawa initiative, which is a Swahili expression for the power of business, functions as a strategic catalyst within Nakuru’s entrepreneurial ecosystem.

While other interventions often focus on broad-based aid, BiasharaPawa distinguishes itself through its targeted approach to solving systemic challenges for women and youth in under-represented sectors. BiasharaPawa moves beyond theoretical support to provide practical, sector-specific relief:

- Dismantling financial barriers- Instead of traditional, high-collateral lending, the initiative creates visibility for alternative financing approaches, including cooperatives and emerging digital funding models, helping entrepreneurs navigate beyond traditional credit barriers.
- Bridging the skills mismatch- Unlike generic training programs, it fosters direct collaboration between industry leaders and TVET institutions to ensure academic curricula align with actual industrial technical requirements.
- Institutional inclusion- It actively brings entrepreneurs with high-level policymakers, such as County Executive Committee Members (CECMs), to address the persistent issue of limited participation in policy design. Its emphasis on mentorship, peer learning, and exposure to role models responds to the clear demand for skills development and practical business support.

What separates BiasharaPawa from standard initiatives is its focus on sectoral depth and peer networking as well as ecosystem-led approach anchored in local ownership. By organizing dialogue around eight specific industries, it addresses the unique friction points of each. Furthermore, it leverages local Entrepreneurial Support Organisations (ESOs) like NakuruBox to provide localized, continuous mentorship rather than one-off workshops, ensuring a self-sustaining cycle of innovation and economic resilience.



The Roadmap to Sustainable Growth

The BiasharaPawa dialogue has laid the groundwork for a fundamental shift in Nakuru County's industrial identity. Moving forward, the true indicator of success will be the migration of youth and women-led ventures from the periphery of the economy into the core of the high-value supply chains. By dismantling the financial issues and bridging the institutional skills gap, Nakuru can transition from a hub of small-scale trade to a regional powerhouse of manufacturing and green innovation. This transformation requires more than just policy; it demands an integrated, ecosystem-led commitment to excellence.

For inquiries:

+254 715 322 573

susan@nakurubox.co.ke