The Chronicle

WEEKLY

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Kenya's governance deficit is an economic problem

THE WORLD BANK LINKS CORRUPTION AND WEAK INSTITUTIONS TO HIGHER BORROWING COSTS AND FEWER JOBS. IT PROJECTS THAT AMBITIOUS REFORM COULD LIFT GDP BY 20% AND ADD 7.7 MILLION BETTER JOBS BY 2035.



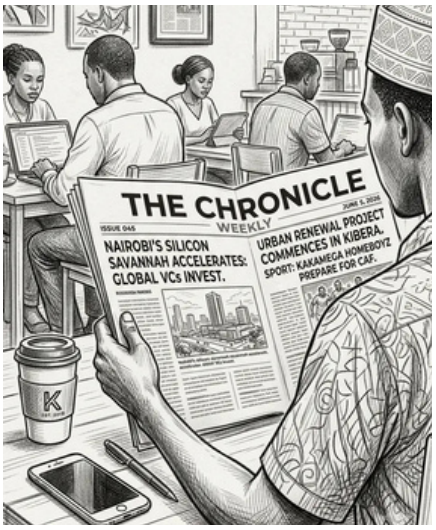
Kenya's alcohol problem is bigger than the drinking age

A PROPOSED LAW SEEKS TO TIGHTEN CONTROLS, BUT CAN IT CURB ILLICIT TRADE WITHOUT HARMING LEGITIMATE BUSINESSES, COUNTIES, OR REVENUE?

The girls who are changing Kenyan sport

KENYA'S HISTORIC YOUTH OLYMPIC RUGBY SEVENS VICTORY HAS BROUGHT A NEW GENERATION OF FEMALE ATHLETES INTO THE SPOTLIGHT.

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Kenyan theatre's real shortage is audience, not shows

KITFest brings 48 performances to the National Theatre, but ticket prices, distance, and limited audience data raise the harder question of how a festival becomes public.

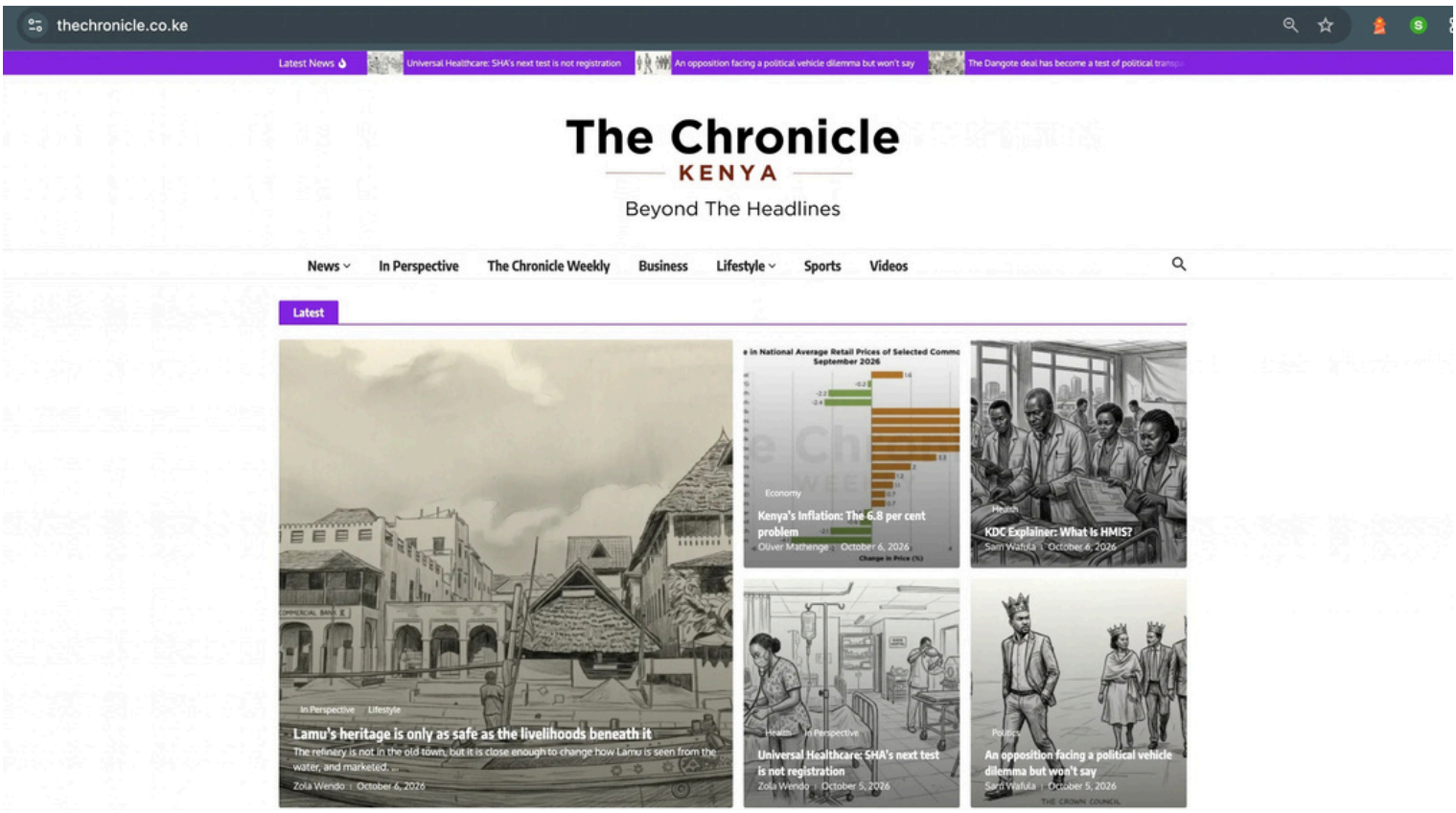
LIFE & CULTURE

The new generation of girls who are changing Kenyan sport

Kenya's under-18 women's rugby sevens team won Youth Olympic gold in Dakar. Turning a medal into a pathway, from school field to senior team, is the harder game.

The Chronicle

WEEKLY



The Chronicle Weekly is the flagship publication of *The Chronicle Kenya*, Kenya's trusted digital news platform owned by *StrategiCrest Ltd*.

While *The Chronicle Kenya* delivers a mix of breaking news and real-time updates across politics, business, health, sports, and lifestyle, the Weekly is its considered, curated counterpart; a deeper read for audiences who want more than headlines.

Published every Monday, *The Chronicle Weekly* distils the week's most important stories into a single, authoritative edition. It brings together *The Chronicle Kenya's* signature editorial strengths: rigorous political reporting, sharp business analysis, contextual perspectives, and vibrant community coverage, in a format designed to be read, saved, and shared.

The *Chronicle Weekly* occupies a distinct space in Kenya's media landscape: it is neither a wire-driven news feed nor a long-form magazine, but a weekly newspaper of record; structured, comprehensive, and grounded in the journalistic values that define *The Chronicle Kenya*. Every edition is built around the belief that informed Kenyans make better decisions, stronger communities, and a more accountable nation.

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Editorial Note



A country is shaped not only by its leaders' decisions, but by the institutions that carry them out.

Kenya's economic debate often focuses on taxes, borrowing, investment and jobs. But a more fundamental question is how effectively public institutions work. This edition of *The Chronicle Weekly* explores that question from several angles.

Our look at Kenya's governance deficit examines how corruption, weak accountability and inefficiency affect growth, public finances and employment. Our debt analysis places Kenya's borrowing in the wider African financing landscape and considers the obligations shaping future choices.

These institutional questions also affect business: the cost of regulation, company performance and public oversight all matter alongside available resources. They matter especially for public safety. Nairobi's rapid development signals progress, but must not endanger those living and working in its buildings. Approvals, inspections and enforcement must protect lives, not simply meet administrative requirements.

This edition also celebrates possibility. Kenya's theatre industry is reaching new platforms and audiences, while the Rising Lionesses show what young Kenyan women can achieve when given the chance to compete. Both stories, however, raise questions of sustainability: how can promising moments become lasting institutions, opportunities and achievements?

That question runs through the edition. Progress is measured not just by policies, buildings, borrowing or medals, but by what they deliver to citizens. We invite you to look beyond the headlines, examine the evidence and engage with the questions that matter.

INTRODUCING

THE BALLOT

Beyond the Campaign Into the Choices

Kenya is heading into a defining **election in 2027** — and *The Chronicle* is launching a new, special publication to help you make sense of it all.

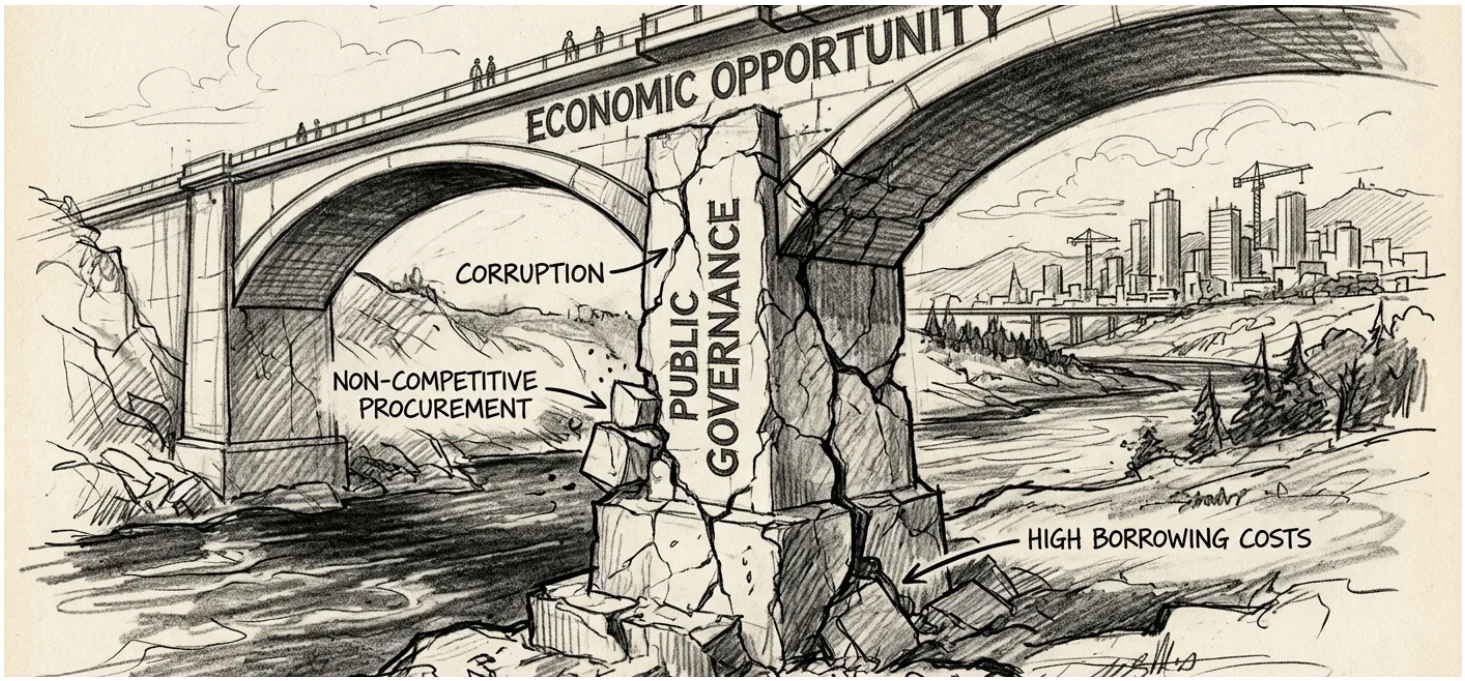
The Ballot is a bi-monthly election intelligence publication that will examine the big questions: who wants to govern, what they're offering, how they've performed, and what it means for Kenya's future.

With in-depth analysis, data-driven insights and balanced reporting, **The Ballot** will go beyond the campaigns to give you the full picture — from coalitions and manifestos to the voter's agenda.

First Edition:
November 13



Kenya's governance deficit is an economic problem



Kenya's economic debate often focuses on raising revenue, reducing debt, attracting investment, creating jobs and restoring household purchasing power. While important, these issues are often treated separately.

The World Bank's latest Kenya Economic Update links many economic constraints to a common cause: the quality of governance.

The report argues that corruption, collusion and weak institutions cost far more than stolen public funds. They influence government revenue and spending, infrastructure and service costs, borrowing costs, business performance and workers' opportunities.

Its central finding is striking: under an ambitious reform scenario that brings corruption control closer to Senegal's and São Tomé and Príncipe's levels, Kenya's economy could be over 20 per cent larger by 2035 than under a no-reform path. The scenario could also create 7.7 million additional, better-quality jobs.

These projections — not guarantees — show the opportunity in tackling institutional weaknesses. Kenya's governance deficit goes beyond political integrity and public-sector ethics; it limits growth, competitiveness, and living standards.

The Fiscal Consequences Of Weak Institutions

Public finances are the first place to understand this relationship.

Kenya faces fiscal pressure: interest payments consume government revenue, limiting funds for development, public services and infrastructure. The World Bank estimates that governance constraints add 2 per cent of GDP to the annual deficit.

Corruption weakens revenue collection, distorts tax policy, reduces compliance and enables diversion of public funds. Non-competitive procurement and inefficient infrastructure spending also mean the government pays more for less.

As Kenya relies more on borrowing, these losses force the government to borrow further, cut spending or raise revenue. Weak governance also increases borrowing risk premiums, as lenders consider repayment capacity, institutional reliability, policy predictability and resource management. Governance weaknesses heighten uncertainty and financing costs.

The World Bank estimates that improving Kenya's corruption performance could cut external borrowing costs by Sh12.6 billion annually for public investment or debt costs.

High interest costs constrain Kenya's fiscal flexibility. Revenue mobilisation and spending cuts alone can't sustainably address debt while institutional weaknesses persist.

Fiscal discipline means tracking every shilling, allocating it transparently, and delivering measurable public value, not merely spending less.



Public Resources Shape Economic Opportunity

The report examines how governance shapes access to economic opportunities. Preferential licensing, politicised state-owned enterprise appointments, uncompetitive procurement and weak power purchase agreements can tie access to state resources to political and economic interests.

As a result, government decisions, contracts and regulatory privileges may be more valuable than productive investment.

These practices affect the wider economy. Uncompetitive procurement can raise the cost of infrastructure and services, while connection-based licensing can block new entrants.

Appointments that ignore institutional stability and technical needs can undermine public enterprises' planning and performance. These distortions weaken competition and deter businesses that rely on predictable rules.

This matters because Kenya's private sector is expected to drive job creation and economic transformation. When connections shape access to opportunities, productive firms struggle to compete and grow.

The World Bank reports that corruption is an increasingly significant business constraint: 39 per cent of firms called it a major or severe obstacle in 2025, up from 25 per cent in 2013. In addition, 36 per cent reported at least one bribery request in the preceding year.

These findings point to an institutional problem that occasional arrests or public declarations of zero tolerance for corruption cannot resolve.

Public procurement needs to be more transparent and competitive, licensing needs to be predictable, and conflicts of interest need to be properly managed. Ensure state enterprises have professional, accountable governance insulated from political interference.

The objective should be to create an economy in which the ability to compete depends on productivity, innovation and the quality of goods and services.

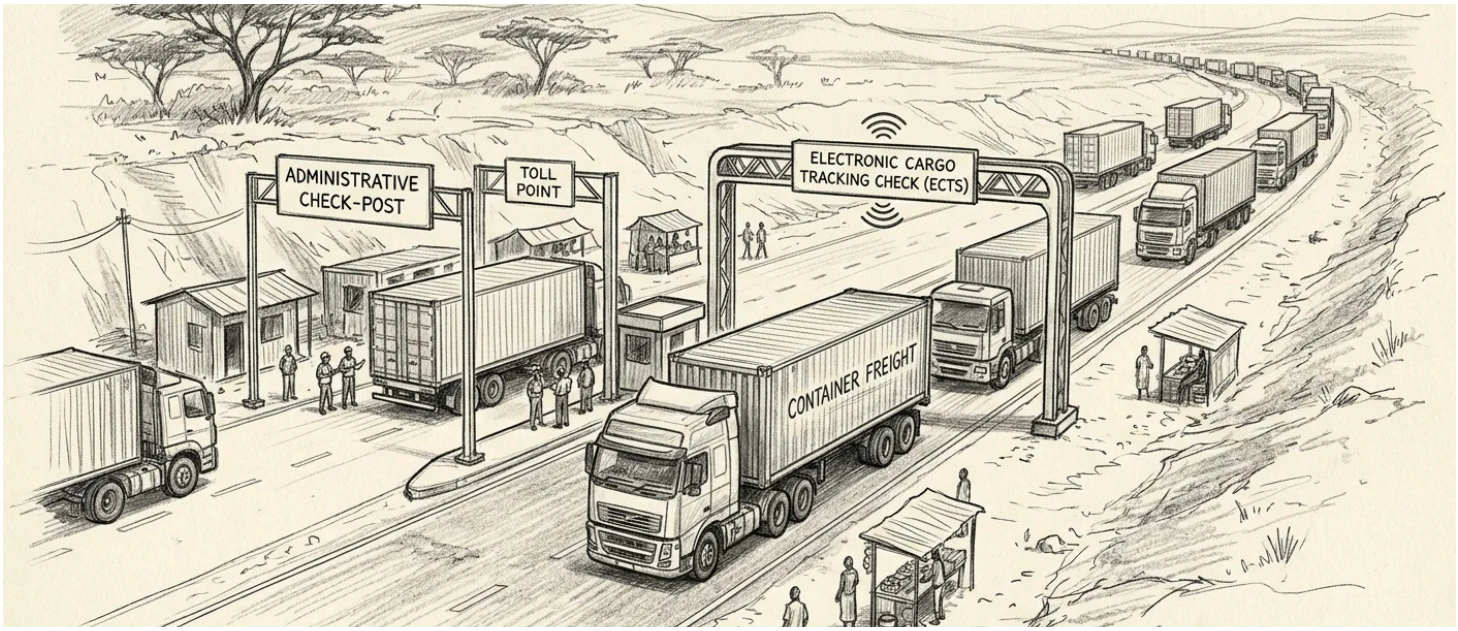
The Cost Of Inefficient Public Investment

Kenya's infrastructure ambitions illustrate the economic costs of weak governance. The country has invested heavily in roads, energy, ports and other infrastructure, but returns depend not just on spending, but on sound planning, procurement, delivery and management.

The World Bank warns that non-competitive procurement and poor project management can raise costs, cause delays and reduce asset quality. Costs may persist after completion through expensive maintenance and repairs — especially damaging when development needs are high and public resources limited.

Overspending diverts funds from other roads, schools, hospitals, water systems and electricity connections. Delays also defer the economic activity projects were meant to enable.

The same applies to state-owned enterprises, which manage essential services such as electricity, transport and water. Their performance shapes the cost and reliability of services used by businesses and households. Management instability, political appointments and weak accountability can therefore affect the wider economy.



The World Bank argues that better governance in these institutions is not just public-sector reform, but essential to improving economy-wide productivity.

The Jobs Kenya Cannot Afford to Lose

The World Bank's most consequential finding may be the link between governance reform and employment. Kenya's challenge is not just creating jobs, but ensuring they are productive, high-quality and provide sustainable incomes. With 83.8% of employment informal, that remains difficult.

Corruption compounds the problem. Bribes cut informal workers' and small businesses' earnings, while corruption and regulatory uncertainty deter formal businesses from investing, expanding and hiring.

The Bank projects that gradual improvements in corruption performance could create nearly three million additional jobs by 2035 compared with no reform; ambitious reforms could generate 7.7 million additional, better jobs. Institutional reform is therefore central to Kenya's employment agenda.

Entrepreneurship agendas, credit, industrialisation and investment promotion matter, but rely on a supportive business environment. Unpredictable licences, bribes demanded from informal traders, and costly, inefficient public services show how governance shapes economic participation.

Turning Governance Into Economic Reform

These findings don't suggest anti-corruption measures alone can solve Kenya's economic challenges. Fiscal pressures, external shocks, skills shortages, infrastructure gaps and structural weaknesses also need attention. But governance reform can strengthen nearly every other economic intervention.

The report calls for stronger financial management, transparent procurement, better revenue administration and state-enterprise oversight, and safeguards against conflicts of interest. Kenya already has a substantial accountability framework; the challenge is applying it consistently.

Anti-corruption investigators and prosecutors need stronger institutions. Despite more Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission investigations, few lead to prosecution. Measure success by lawful outcomes, recovered funds and fewer repeat offences — not announced investigations or arrests.

Citizens and businesses need accessible information to scrutinise procurement, contracts, spending, and state enterprises — not rely on sporadic disclosures or investigations. Reform is credible when people see institutions improve.

Good governance helps manage the economy, reduce debt, attract investment, boost productivity and create better jobs. The World Bank estimates ambitious reforms could expand the economy and add millions of jobs by 2035. Success requires lasting political commitment, independent institutions and accountable distribution of resources and opportunities.

Debates on revenue, borrowing and growth sectors remain vital. Kenya must also consider what better-performing institutions could achieve with existing resources. The answer will shape its fiscal future and the jobs, investment and prosperity available to the next generation.

Governance deficits affect the economy, businesses and citizens whose opportunities depend on effective use of public resources. Governance reform is not separate from economic reform; it is essential to it.

The cost of doing business is also the cost of poor governance



Kenya's business costs stem from more than taxation. For companies operating, expanding or launching products, institutional quality, regulatory predictability and the integrity of government systems also shape the cost of doing business.

Some costs appear on balance sheets; others include delays in approvals, uncertain regulatory decisions, advance payments, multiple inspections, and the financial impact of policies introduced without adequate consultation or implementation plans.

Individually, these may seem like administrative hassles; together, they undermine competitiveness.

The World Bank's Kenya Economic Update, released November 4, reinforces this concern. Its governance analysis finds that weak public institutions raise the cost of essential business inputs, discourage investment and constrain productive job creation.

The report estimates that governance failures, including corruption, collusion and inefficiencies in public spending and revenue collection, could add up to 2 per cent of GDP to annual fiscal deficits. It also identifies power, logistics and land as essential services where weak governance increases business costs and uncertainty.

The effects reach beyond businesses. Higher transport costs eventually raise consumer prices; delays in obtaining electricity connections or construction approvals slow investment.

When firms spend on administrative obstacles rather than production, they have fewer resources for jobs, innovation, and growth.

The key question is not just whether Kenya is expensive for business, but how much of that cost is unavoidable — and how much results from the way public institutions operate.

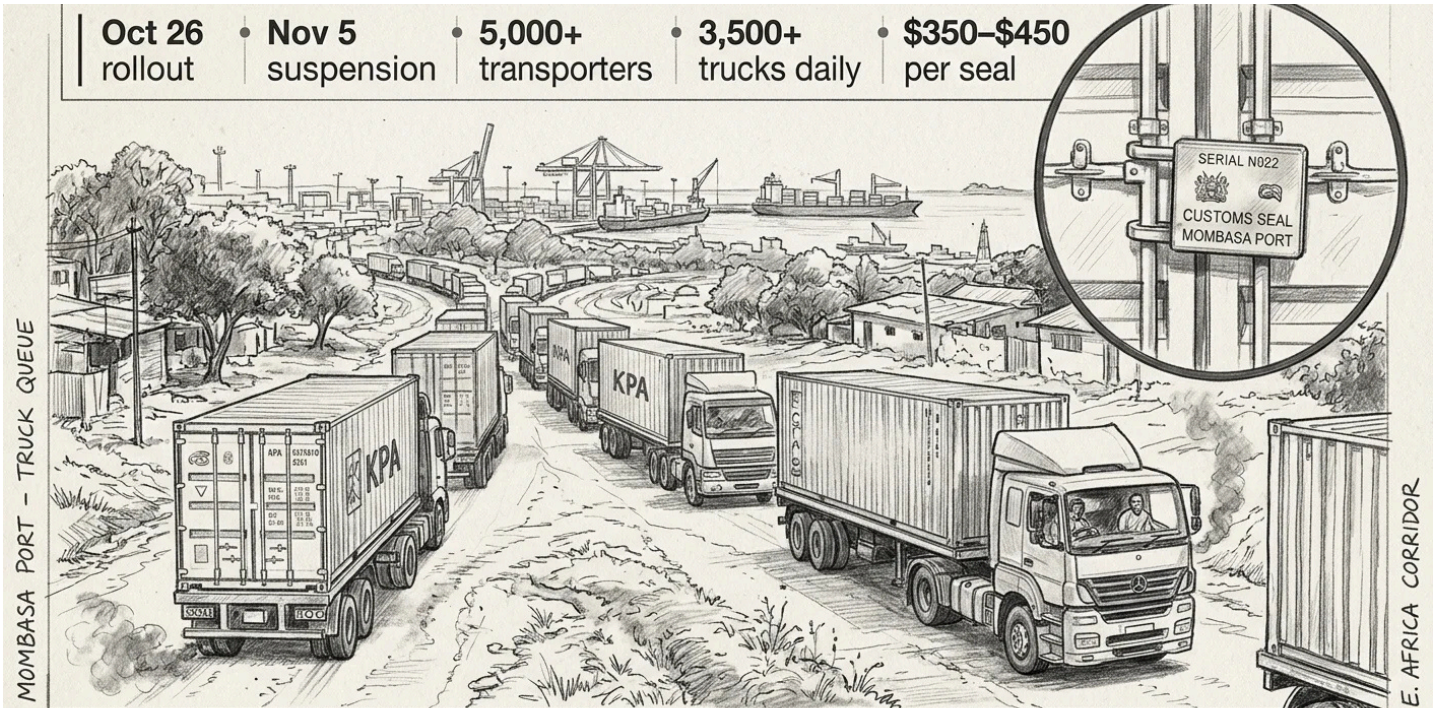
Cost That Does Not Appear On The Tax Invoice

One of the World Bank's most revealing findings is that corruption has become a business constraint: 39 per cent of firms call it a major obstacle, while 48 per cent of medium-sized firms say they must give gifts to get things done.

Medium-sized firms are crucial to the economy. Beyond the survival stage, they can drive formal employment, investment and domestic value creation, but often lack the financial strength, market power and institutional access of larger corporations. Informal payments and administrative uncertainty make expansion costlier and riskier.

Unpredictable licensing timelines, inspections and enforcement can cause businesses to delay investment, hire fewer people or avoid markets.

Smaller firms are especially vulnerable: unlike larger companies with compliance teams and consultants, they must divert owners' time and working capital from production to navigate regulations.



The result is an uneven business environment where success depends not only on product quality, but also on navigating institutions. Competition should reward efficiency, better products and customer service — not the ability to overcome administrative obstacles.

When Regulation Adds Business Costs

The dispute over new electronic cargo tracking seals illustrates the link between policy implementation and business costs.

The Kenya Revenue Authority's multi-vendor, user-owned tracking framework became fully operational on October 26. Businesses moving goods under customs control must use seals from approved private providers.

The system aims to improve monitoring, expand provider access, and strengthen customs enforcement-goals that protect transit cargo, collect revenue, and reinforce Kenya's regional logistics role. But its rollout raises a key question: who pays for mandatory monitoring?

On November 5, the Kenya Transporters Association suspended cargo loading with the seals, saying transporters had absorbed compliance costs without a reasonable way to recover them. Reported charges are $350–$450 per seal (about Sh 45,483–58,478).

More than 5,000 transporters reportedly joined the protest. At least 3,500 trucks collect containers from Mombasa Port daily, so prolonged disruption could affect domestic supply chains and regional trade.

The dispute concerns seal costs, but the broader issue is how mandatory compliance rules are designed, explained and funded.

A policy may be justified yet poorly implemented if it ignores costs, who bears them, and the time and information businesses need to adapt.

A multi-vendor framework may promote competition, but cannot ensure affordability when businesses have little choice of provider.
Nor does it clarify whether transporters, cargo owners or the State should pay.

The effects may reach beyond the immediate dispute. Mombasa delays could raise storage, transport and inventory costs, disrupt deliveries, slow manufacturers awaiting raw materials, and force traders to reconsider prices.

For landlocked economies dependent on the Northern Corridor, impacts cross borders. Port competitiveness depends on both efficient cargo handling and predictable, affordable transport to final destinations.

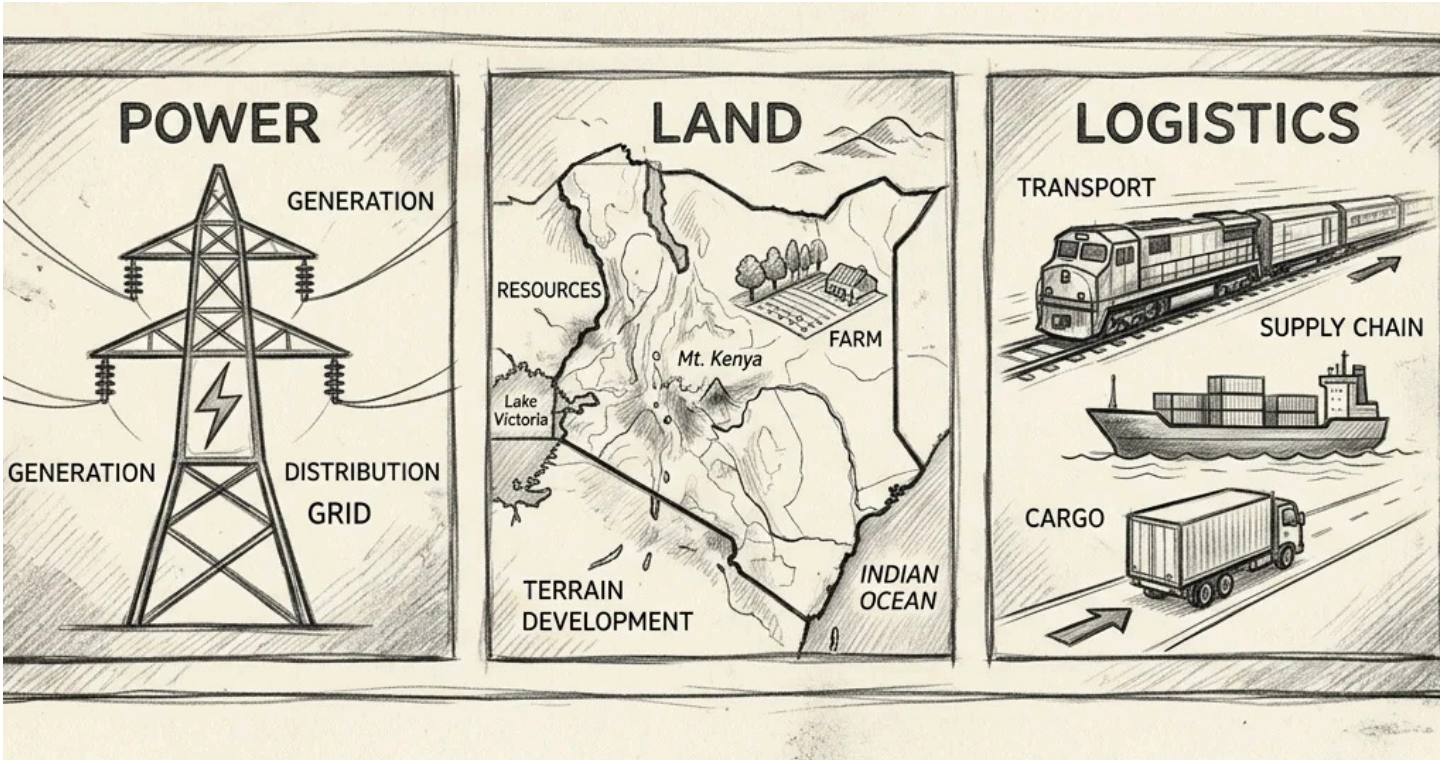
Regulatory efficiency should be judged by outcomes, not the sophistication of the system.

Power, Land & Logistics: Cost of Weak Institutions

The World Bank's identification of power, logistics and land as areas where weak governance raises business costs is significant: these are essential inputs to nearly all productive activity.

Electricity costs affect manufacturers, commercial buildings, agricultural processors, hospitality businesses and small enterprises. Businesses need affordable, reliable power, predictable tariffs and transparent cost-setting.

The World Bank identifies opaque contracts and governance weaknesses in backbone industries as



Kenya Power's reported Sh24.99 billion profit for 2025/26 signals financial improvement, but raises a key question about whether the gains are making electricity more affordable.

A healthier utility can strengthen energy-sector competitiveness, but institutional finances mean little if electricity remains costly.

Investment also requires secure land access, reliable records and registration, and timely dispute resolution. Unclear ownership and approval delays can tie up capital in factories, warehouses, hotels and commercial developments, increase legal and financing costs, and postpone opportunities.

Kenya's role as East and Central Africa's gateway depends on efficient ports, roads, customs and predictable administration. Regulatory friction raises costs and delays shipments, hindering its ambitions as a regional manufacturing and distribution hub.

High electricity costs, inefficient logistics and uncertain land administration discourage investment in productive assets and weaken competitiveness.

The Price Is Ultimately Paid In Jobs and Growth

Poor governance is often measured by corruption losses or failed projects. The World Bank's analysis highlights a broader cost: governance shapes how many productive businesses emerge, how quickly firms grow and how many people find decent work.

This is urgent in Kenya, where 83.8 per cent of jobs remain informal, often with lower pay and productivity.

Creating jobs takes more than promoting entrepreneurship or attracting investors; businesses must be able to grow, formalise and compete without needless institutional costs.

The World Bank estimates ambitious reforms could create 7.7 million better-quality jobs and raise GDP by up to 20 per cent by 2035. These projections are not guarantees, but show the potential of addressing constraints within policymakers' reach.

Priorities include fiscal discipline, transparent procurement, beneficial ownership disclosure, predictable regulation, and better tax and customs administration. Together, these should drive competitiveness, not remain isolated administrative tasks.

Competitive procurement can improve infrastructure, reduce costs and reward merit — not just prevent theft. Better tax and customs systems can raise revenue without burdening compliant firms.

Regulatory safeguards for property, workers, consumers and the environment remain essential. Rules should be clear, proportionate, consistent and honestly administered, distinguishing public value from bureaucracy that enables rent-seeking.

Kenya needs a private sector able to invest, innovate and create jobs. Firms cannot do so at scale when institutional inefficiency, not production or competition, drives costs.

A more competitive environment can broaden the tax base, attract investment, create jobs and ease pressure to raise revenue.

DEBT TIGHTROPE

KENYA & AFRICA'S FINANCING LANDSCAPE

Kenya's external debt reached US$46.31 billion at the end of 2025, up 7.6 per cent. Relative to exports, it is higher than the region's, and private creditors charge 8.8 per cent on new loans, compared with 6.8 per cent across Sub-Saharan Africa.

CONTINENTAL SNAPSHOT — THE BIG PICTURE



48%
External debt/GNI

4%
Debt service/GNI

164%
External debt/exports

US$2.123tn
Regional GNI

15%
Debt service/exports

*GNI stands for Gross National Income.

Sub-Saharan Africa entered 2026 with a large and rising external debt stock. The figures here are measured at the end of 2025.

FOCUS ON KENYA — STRATEGIC DEBT & LIABILITY MANAGEMENT



DEBT STRUCTURE	US$bn
Public & publicly guaranteed	43.85
Short-term debt	2.20
Private nonguaranteed	0.27

CREDITOR MIX	US$bn
Multilateral	26.30
Bilateral	7.83
Private creditors	9.71

KENYA'S FOUR DEBT PRESSURE INDICATORS

212%
External debt/exports

23%
Debt service/exports

35%
External debt/GNI

4%
Debt service/GNI

Kenya's external debt stock reached US$46.31 billion at end-2025, up 7.6% year-on-year.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA CONTEXT

US$673bn
PUBLIC & PUBLICLY

US$303bn
MULTILATERAL CREDITORS

US$106bn
BILATERAL CREDITORS

US$264bn
PRIVATE CREDITORS

THE PRICE OF NEW BORROWING — AVERAGE TERMS ON 2025 COMMITMENTS

CREDITOR TYPE	KENYA	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
Official interest rate	1.9%	2.4%
Private interest rate	8.8%	6.8%
Official maturity	25 years	26 years

Beyond Kenya, the regional debt mix shows the importance of multilateral, bilateral and private financing — alongside short-term and private non-guaranteed obligations.

Source: World Bank, International Debt Report 2026

Kenya's alcohol problem is bigger than the drinking age



Kenya's proposed alcohol-regulation overhaul has sparked debate about public health, business, taxation and government responsibility.

But the key question is not simply whether the legal drinking age should rise from 18 to 21; it is whether the country can build a system that addresses the problems it aims to solve.

Introduced in the National Assembly on November 5, the 2026 Alcoholic Drinks and Drugs Control Laws (Amendment) Bill would expand regulations on alcohol production, distribution, licensing and sales.

It proposes raising the minimum drinking age, adding licensing and registration requirements, restricting retail and online sales, tightening transport controls and imposing a levy on manufacturers and importers.

These substantial changes would reshape the formal alcohol industry and establish new national and county regulatory structures.

The Alcoholic Beverages Association of Kenya (ABAK) has called for the Bill's withdrawal, warning it could threaten jobs, investment and government revenue while strengthening illicit alcohol markets.

As an industry lobby, ABAK has clear interests, and its projections warrant independent scrutiny. Still, dismissing its objections as mere commercial self-protection would overlook broader policy concerns.

Kenya faces serious alcohol-control challenges. The Bill should be judged by whether it reduces harmful consumption, disrupts illegal production and distribution, protects consumers and strengthens enforcement. More restrictions do not automatically mean better regulation.

The Illicit Market Is The Real Test

ABAK estimates that illicit alcohol makes up about 60 per cent of Kenya's alcohol market by litres of alcohol equivalent. ABAK also reports that illicit volumes have risen 27 per cent since 2022, outpacing the legitimate market.

These figures highlight a central policy challenge: much of the market may already lie beyond conventional licensing and regulatory controls.

This should shape assessment of the proposed legislation, which adds controls for legitimate manufacturers, importers, distributors and retailers, and proposes digital tracking of licensed products, stronger national oversight of registration, inspections and compliance.

These measures could improve visibility in the formal supply chain and hinder counterfeit or adulterated products from entering legitimate channels. But tracking legal products will not eliminate illegal production.



Illicit manufacturers may lack licences, approved labels and formal distribution networks. Authorities must locate production sites, trace unsafe-product networks and raw-material sources, and secure prosecutions — not just conduct periodic raids that leave the business model intact.

Kenya's rules often outpace enforcement, and alcohol is no exception. New laws can expand regulators' powers but cannot replace intelligence-led action, inter-agency coordination, effective prosecution, or accountability for those enabling illegal trade.

The government must explain how the framework will close these gaps. What enforcement resources will it add, how will national and county agencies coordinate, and what measurable reduction in illicit production and distribution does it expect and by when?

Without clear answers, Kenya risks building a more elaborate system to supervise businesses already visible to authorities while the less visible market continues to grow.

The Price Of Formal Compliance

The Bill proposes a Sh2-per-litre levy on manufactured and imported alcoholic drinks. Though modest per product, its combined impact could be substantial.

ABAK estimates the levy would add Sh1.3 billion annually to legitimate manufacturers' costs, widening the price gap with illicit products. The impact depends on whether manufacturers pass on costs, consumer price sensitivity, market structure and enforcement.

Taxation and regulation interact with market conditions. When consumers are price-sensitive and illicit alternatives are readily available, added costs for formal businesses may create unintended incentives.

The government should disclose the levy's economic assumptions: expected revenue, projected sales volumes, and assessments of effects on prices, jobs, investment and formal producers' competitiveness.

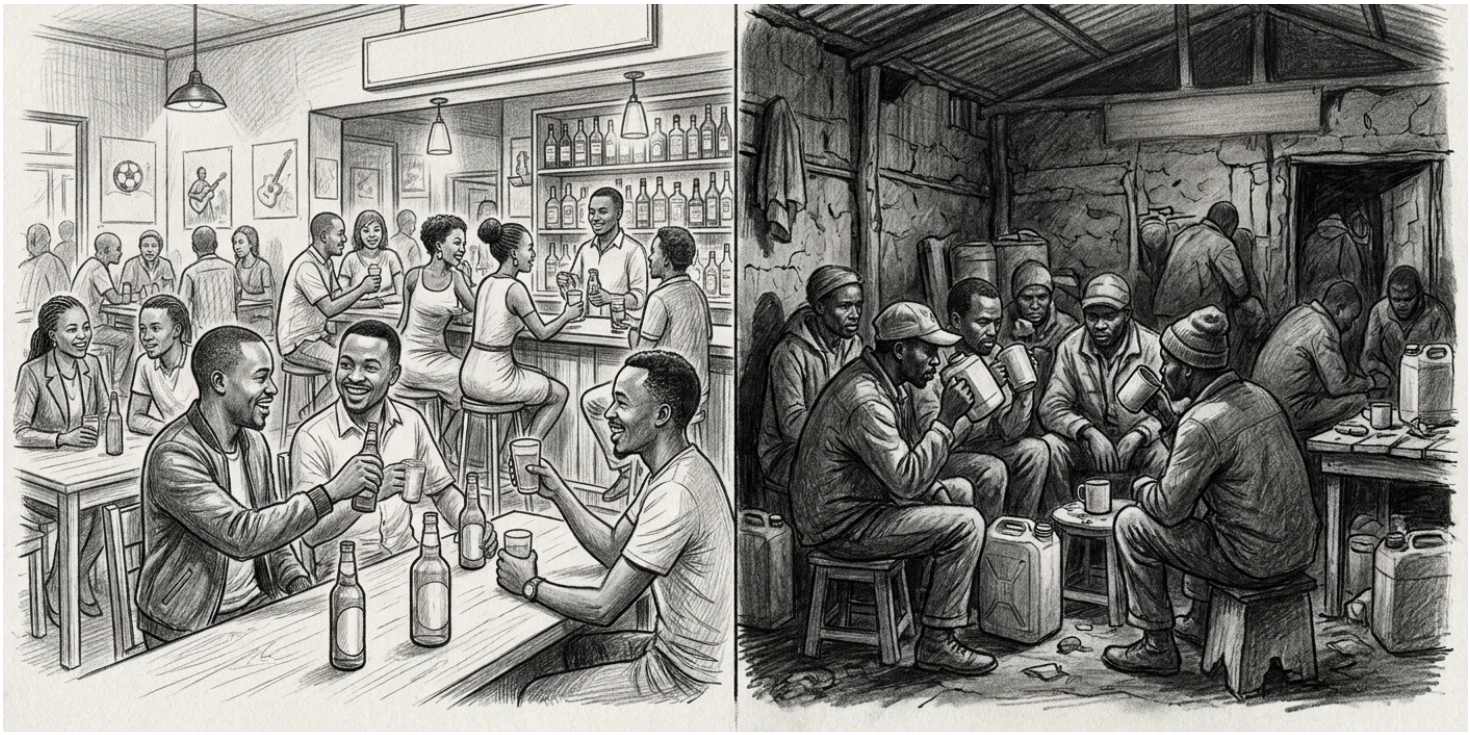
The Bill also establishes an Alcoholic Drinks Control Fund. At least half its annual income would fund the National Alcoholic Drinks Control Committee, and at least 15 per cent would support civil society programmes preventing and managing alcohol and drug abuse.

Dedicated funding for prevention, rehabilitation, research and enforcement can be valuable. But how will the public know whether the Fund improves health and enforcement? Its success should be measured by outcomes—not revenue collected or institutional growth—including less alcohol-related harm, reduced access by minors, safer products, stronger enforcement and declining illicit trade.

The Question Of Who Regulates

The Bill's most consequential institutional question is the division of responsibilities between national and county governments.

It proposes a National Alcoholic Drinks Control Committee to license manufacturers and importers, oversee product registration, coordinate inspections and administer national regulatory systems. County licensing committees would oversee alcohol outlets.



The Constitution assigns liquor licensing to counties, while national government has legitimate roles in policy, public health, standards and law enforcement within its mandate. Overlapping approvals, inspections and rules could raise costs without improving enforcement or accountability.

Parliament should assess the proposal against the constitutional division of functions and existing county regulations, and hear the Council of Governors on implementation. It should determine whether existing institutions can be strengthened before creating new ones and identify the enforcement gaps the proposed powers would close.

Public Health And The Modern Economy

The proposed alcohol-sales restrictions warrant closer examination. The Bill would limit licensing at supermarkets, restaurants and other specified premises; ban online sales, courier services and home delivery; and restrict transport hours, potentially disrupting legitimate supply chains.

Some controls may be justified on public-health grounds, such as preventing sales to minors, irresponsible promotions and access in inappropriate settings. But blanket restrictions need to identify the harms they address and provide evidence they will reduce them.

Banning online sales and delivery might limit access but could drive consumers to unregulated sellers. If licensed businesses cannot meet demand, what stops it from shifting to less accountable suppliers? Rules for supermarkets and other outlets should distinguish businesses with safeguards from those without, rather than assume venue type determines responsible sales.

Restrictions could also affect connected hospitality, tourism, retail and logistics businesses, reducing revenue, jobs, procurement and investment — not just manufacturing.

ABAK estimates that raising the minimum drinking age could risk Sh3.3 billion in annual retail and hospitality revenue, Sh1.8 billion in tax revenue, 8,896 jobs and 11,792 licensed outlets. It says about three million Kenyans aged 18–21 would be affected. These preliminary estimates are unverified. Parliament should scrutinise their methodology and require government evidence for the restrictions.

The debate should not pit business against public health. Regulation must protect both, ensuring business interests do not outweigh the public good.

Regulation Must Produce Results

Kenya's proposed legislation comes amid efforts to grow the economy, attract investment and increase revenue, alongside persistent concerns about illicit alcohol and harmful consumption. These aims should reinforce each other.

The government is right to strengthen consumer protections, but success should be measured by outcomes, not the number of restrictions, licences or institutions.

The Bill must explain how it will curb illegal production and distribution, enforce the proposed age threshold and address licensing gaps. Parliament should require transparent assessments of economic, constitutional, and public-health effects. County governments, businesses, health experts, civil society and consumers should help shape policy.

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Nairobi City is growing; but who is ensuring it is safe?



Kenya's urban landscape is changing faster than the systems designed to manage it. Low-rise buildings are giving way to taller residential and commercial developments as neighbourhoods grow denser, land faces increasing pressure, and housing demand reshapes cities and towns.

This transformation is not inherently a problem. Growing cities need more homes, offices, shops, schools and public facilities. Higher-density development can use land efficiently, support public transport and bring services closer to residents.

The question is whether infrastructure, planning and regulatory systems are keeping pace. Recent events in Nairobi have sharpened that concern.

On October 23, an 18-storey building under construction collapsed in Eastleigh, prompting a rescue operation and renewed scrutiny of construction approvals, inspections and enforcement.

By November 5, eight deaths had been reported, and 16 people remained missing, according to the Associated Press.

Days later, residents of a Riruta Satellite building were evacuated after dangerous cracks raised structural-safety concerns. Nairobi County and the National Construction Authority ordered residents to leave while they investigated.

The building was later sealed, and tenants were given supervised access to retrieve their belongings.

The incidents differ, and investigations must establish what happened in each. Together, however, they raise a broader public-interest issue: building safety cannot rely solely on developers' intentions or occupants' assurances. It depends on decisions, professional responsibilities and public oversight working before a structure becomes dangerous.

A Permit Is Not A Safety Guarantee

The Eastleigh collapse has raised questions about development approvals and regulatory enforcement, including the project's architectural plans, change-of-use process, National Construction Authority (NCA) registration and required approvals.

Nairobi Governor Johnson Sakaja said the county had not approved the plans and had attempted to enforce compliance while the NCA said it registered the project in July 2025. Official records and ongoing investigations must establish the sequence of approvals, registration, enforcement and construction.

These processes are distinct: NCA registration is not county development approval, and neither proves construction followed approved designs. A project may meet one administrative requirement and fail another.



County governments oversee development control and building approvals; the NCA regulates the construction industry and registers projects. Architects, engineers, contractors and other professionals have defined duties, and buildings must meet requirements before occupation.

The National Building Code 2024 sets standards for design, construction, safety and inspection. An occupation certificate confirms a completed building meets applicable conditions for use.

The issue is whether rules are consistently applied, inspections are meaningful, and violations are addressed before people are endangered.

Who detects construction beyond approved plans or halts work after an enforcement notice? Who stops premature occupation, and do regulators have the resources and legal authority to secure compliance?

These are questions of institutional performance, not just construction technique.

Cost Of Weak Enforcement Is Paid By Residents

Regulatory failures can do more than cause collapses. Unsafe construction can wipe out savings, displace families, disrupt businesses and strain emergency services.

Evacuated residents may suddenly lose access to their homes and face uncertainty over rent, temporary housing and belongings.

Tenants are especially vulnerable because they often lack information about building approvals, designs and inspections.

They may rent a flat and pay a deposit without being able to verify that it is approved or safe.

This information gap belongs in policy discussions. Residents should not have to identify structural defects or obtain official records when they lack the expertise and access to do so.

The Architectural Association of Kenya's Mulika Mjengo initiative shows how public participation can support oversight. Its 2025 report, *Is That Building Safe?*, documented public reports and site inspections in Nairobi, giving residents a way to flag potentially unsafe developments.

Such efforts should complement — not replace — public regulators. Residents can report suspicious construction, but cannot conduct professional inspections, enforce planning rules or prosecute violations.

Oversight must also address hazards short of collapse, including cracks, unauthorised extensions, blocked routes, inadequate fire exits, poor drainage and unsafe wiring. A city that acts only after a building fails intervenes too late.

Planning Must Keep Pace With Development

Nairobi's building-safety debate is also about planning. Housing demand, jobs and transport access make land in high-demand neighbourhoods increasingly valuable, encouraging developers to maximise plots.

Higher density can support a sensible urban future, but only with adequate roads, water, sewerage, drainage, waste services, emergency access and public facilities.



Even a structurally sound building can make a neighbourhood unsafe if its infrastructure cannot support residents.

Building approvals must therefore be tied to physical planning. County governments need reliable records of development, approvals and construction, and must assess whether local infrastructure can cope.

Planning, building inspection, fire safety, public health and disaster management also require coordination.

A credible city-wide programme should maintain a transparent, regularly updated register of buildings and projects, noting approved use, floors, responsible professionals, inspections and occupancy while protecting legitimate personal and commercial information.

Prioritise inspections of high-risk buildings, including those with visible defects, unauthorised extensions, questionable approvals or premature occupation. Findings should trigger deadlines, follow-up inspections and proportionate sanctions for continued violations.

Authorities must also explain what happens to residents when buildings are condemned. Necessary evacuations should include clear reasons, risk explanations, instructions and coordinated access to essential belongings.

If residents are displaced because a developer or landlord broke the law, responsibility for their losses must not vanish into administration.

Safety Is Part Of The Urban Development Promise

Kenya's cities need more housing, better land use and predictable rules that let responsible developers invest without being undercut by those who ignore planning requirements, compromise structural standards or bypass inspections.

That takes more than post-tragedy crackdowns. Regulators must identify violations early, professional bodies enforce standards, counties maintain accurate records, and breaches face consequences proportionate to the risks.

The Eastleigh investigation should establish both the technical cause of the collapse and the administrative decisions that enabled it. The Riruta evacuation should explain how the building was approved, occupied and monitored, and whether warning signs were missed.

These findings should inform a broad review of urban construction, not another inquiry whose recommendations fade from view.

Urban growth signals economic and social change, but counting floors, buildings and housing units alone cannot measure progress. Development must also ensure people can live, work and travel without avoidable risks.

Nairobi's growth will be judged not by how fast it builds upward, but by whether its institutions make safety a condition of development — not a concern raised after disaster.

In Numbers

Sh154 billion

LOANS

Digital Credit Providers' outstanding loan book after disbursing Sh43.7 billion in the six months to June 30, 2026.

Sh3.4 billion

OVER SUBSCRIBED

The amount by which the Quickmart Supermarket's IPO was oversubscibed after receiving Sh18.4 billion in bids against Sh15 billion target,

8.37%

STAKE

The stake that NCBA investors have received as part of their compensation after selling their 66 per cent of the business to Nedbank.

200

JAIL TERM

The number of years in jail that the court handed down to controversial pastor Mackenzie for the killing of 190 children in Shakahola.

Quote of the Week



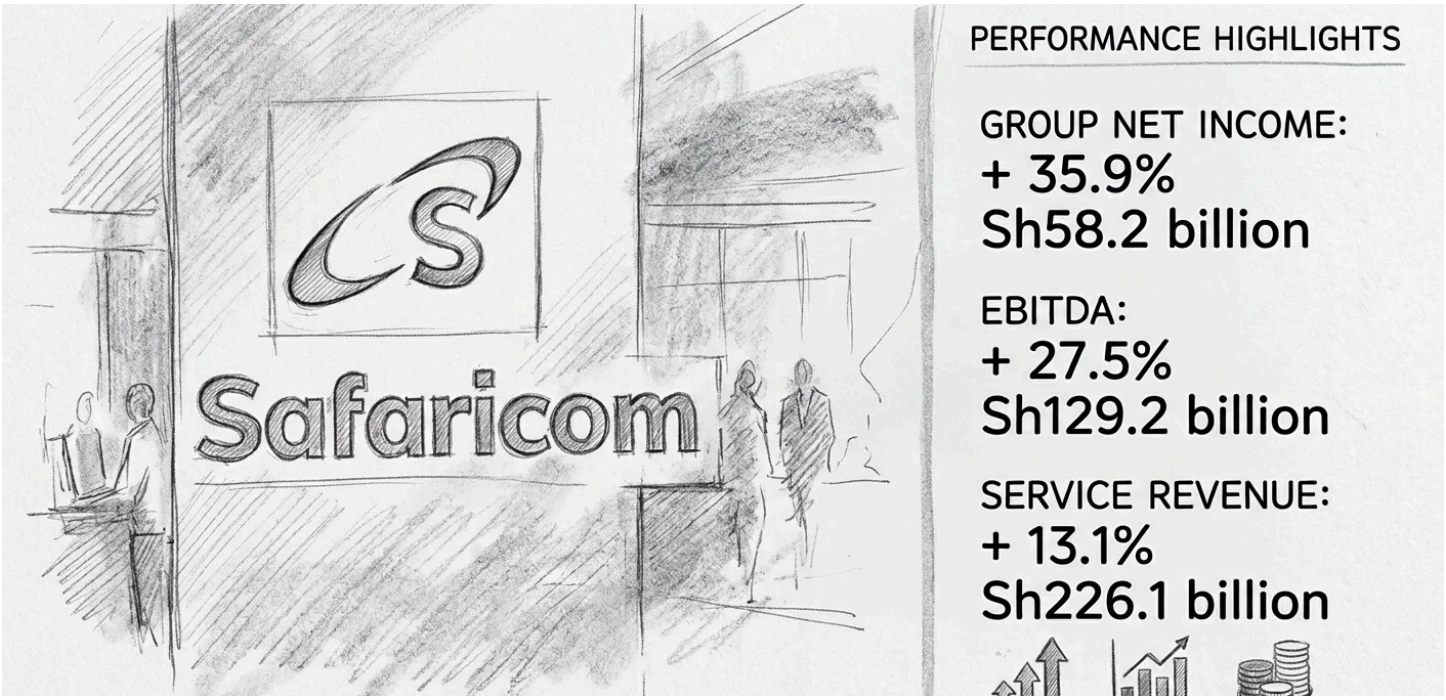
"I want to tell Kenyans, relax. The Super Alliance is in the making. Those who are busy counting our disagreements should know that we are going to the people together, and the people are waiting for us.

- Ukombozi Alliance Leader Kalonzo Musyoka

Advertisement



Safaricom's 36% profit jump is mostly an Ethiopia story



Safaricom's headline reads like a rally.

Group net income rose 35.9 per cent to Sh58.2 billion in the six months to September 30; earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) increased 27.5 per cent to Sh129.2 billion, and service revenue grew 13.1 per cent to Sh226.1 billion.

But the gap between revenue growth of 13.1 per cent and net income growth of 35.9 per cent is the more interesting story. Safaricom is making substantially more profit without growing its revenue at anything close to the same pace.

That performance reflects the strength of its Kenyan business, but also Ethiopia's changing contribution, where a dramatic reduction in start-up losses has improved the group's overall numbers.

Kenya Is Solid, But Slower In Pace

Service revenue rose 11.3 per cent to Sh216 billion, earnings before interest and tax (EBIT) increased 13.7 per cent to Sh101.8 billion, and net income grew 13.8 per cent to Sh66.3 billion.

Crossing the Sh100 billion EBIT mark in a six-month reporting period is a significant milestone, but the underlying picture shows a mature business converting steady revenue growth into slightly faster earnings growth.

M-PESA remains central to that performance. Its revenue increased 13.6 per cent to Sh100.1 billion, crossing the Sh100 billion mark for the first time in a half-year period.

That is equivalent to about 46.3 per cent of Kenya's service revenue, based on reported figures, underscoring how much of Safaricom's domestic business is now tied to financial services rather than traditional telecommunications.

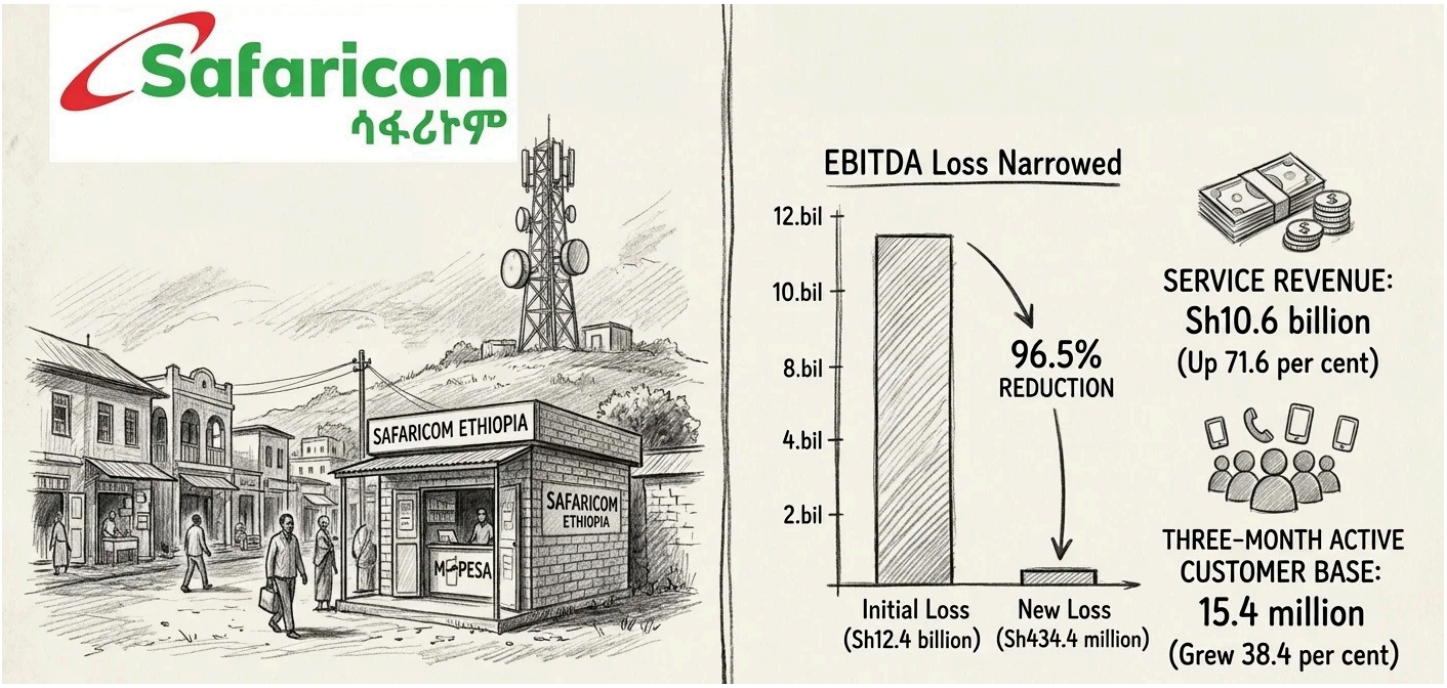
Ethiopia Changing Group's Profit Equation

Group EBITDA increased by approximately Sh27.9 billion compared with the corresponding period last year. Ethiopia's EBITDA loss narrowed by 96.5 per cent, from an estimated Sh12.4 billion to Sh434.4 million.

That reduction alone represents an improvement of approximately Sh12 billion, accounting for a substantial share of the group's EBITDA increase.

The Ethiopian operation recorded service revenue of Sh10.6 billion, up 71.6 per cent, while its three-month active customer base grew 38.4 per cent to 15.4 million.

These are important indicators of commercial expansion, but the reduction in losses is arguably more consequential to the group's immediate financial performance.



Ethiopia is now a meaningful contributor to growth. Safaricom says the operation accounted for approximately 17.9 per cent of group service revenue growth during the period.

However, there is an important distinction between reducing losses and building a profitable business. Group net income of Sh58.2 billion remains below the Sh66.3 billion generated by Kenya alone.

The difference reflects the losses and other adjustments outside the domestic operation. Ethiopia's improving performance has therefore helped lift group profitability, but the subsidiary is not yet generating positive earnings.

The distinction matters because reducing losses can deliver a substantial improvement in reported profit, but it is not an earnings engine that can keep producing the same gains indefinitely. Once the losses have been eliminated, further improvement must come from actual operating profitability.

Full-Year Guidance Raises A More Difficult Question
Safaricom has retained its FY2027 guidance, including group EBIT of Sh180 billion to Sh187 billion, Kenya EBIT of Sh195 billion to Sh199 billion and an Ethiopia EBIT loss of Sh12 billion to Sh15 billion.

Group EBIT stood at Sh91.1 billion in the first half, putting it close to the halfway mark of the annual target. Kenya's Sh101.8 billion also leaves the domestic business with a substantial contribution already secured.

Ethiopia is where the numbers become more complicated. Its first-half EBIT loss was reportedly Sh11.4 billion.

If the full-year guidance still anticipates a loss of between Sh12 billion and Sh15 billion, the implied second-half loss is only Sh600 million to Sh3.6 billion.

That is a demanding improvement, particularly when considered alongside the difference between EBITDA and EBIT. Although Ethiopia's EBITDA loss narrowed to approximately Sh434 million, its EBIT loss remained much larger. The difference suggests depreciation and amortisation expenses of roughly Sh11 billion in the first half.

This distinction matters for investors. EBITDA break-even, which management expects to achieve by the end of the financial year, does not mean the subsidiary will have reached EBIT break-even or become profitable after accounting for the cost of its network and other assets.

The retained guidance therefore deserves closer scrutiny. Management needs to explain how the expected second-half improvement in Ethiopia's EBIT is to be achieved, and how much of it depends on operating performance rather than accounting movements.

Operating Environment Is Less Forgiving

In his presentation, Chief Executive Peter Ndegwa acknowledged that higher food, fuel and transport costs continue to put pressure on household incomes in Kenya.

This has implications for a business whose growth increasingly depends on customers using more services, upgrading devices and spending more through digital platforms.



The presentation also points to rising inflation in Kenya, with the rate increasing from approximately 4.4 per cent in March to 6.8 per cent in September, alongside persistent affordability pressures.

In Ethiopia, inflation and currency depreciation create a different set of challenges. The birr's weakening against the dollar reduces the translated value of local-currency revenue when reported in shillings, while inflation and higher operating costs put pressure on customers and the business.

There is also a regulatory dimension. Safaricom told investors that regulator-led interventions in Ethiopia had improved the operating environment, but that further action was needed on minimum-cost-led price correction.

In practical terms, the company is calling for a regulatory framework that addresses the cost of providing telecommunications services and limits pricing that it considers unsustainable.

That position reflects the difficult balance between competition, affordability and the economics of network investment in a market where Safaricom is still building scale.

Strategic Bets Increasingly Visible

MyOneApp, launched at the beginning of the financial year, has recorded 7.3 million downloads and 4.5 million active users. Safaricom plans to retire the separate M-PESA and MySafaricom applications over the coming months, moving customers towards a single digital platform.

The move is commercially significant. It gives Safaricom greater control over the customer relationship, creates opportunities to cross-sell connectivity and financial services, and provides a common platform for personalised offers and other digital products.

But migrating millions of customers from familiar applications to a consolidated platform is also a major execution challenge, particularly where reliability, convenience and trust are central to financial transactions.

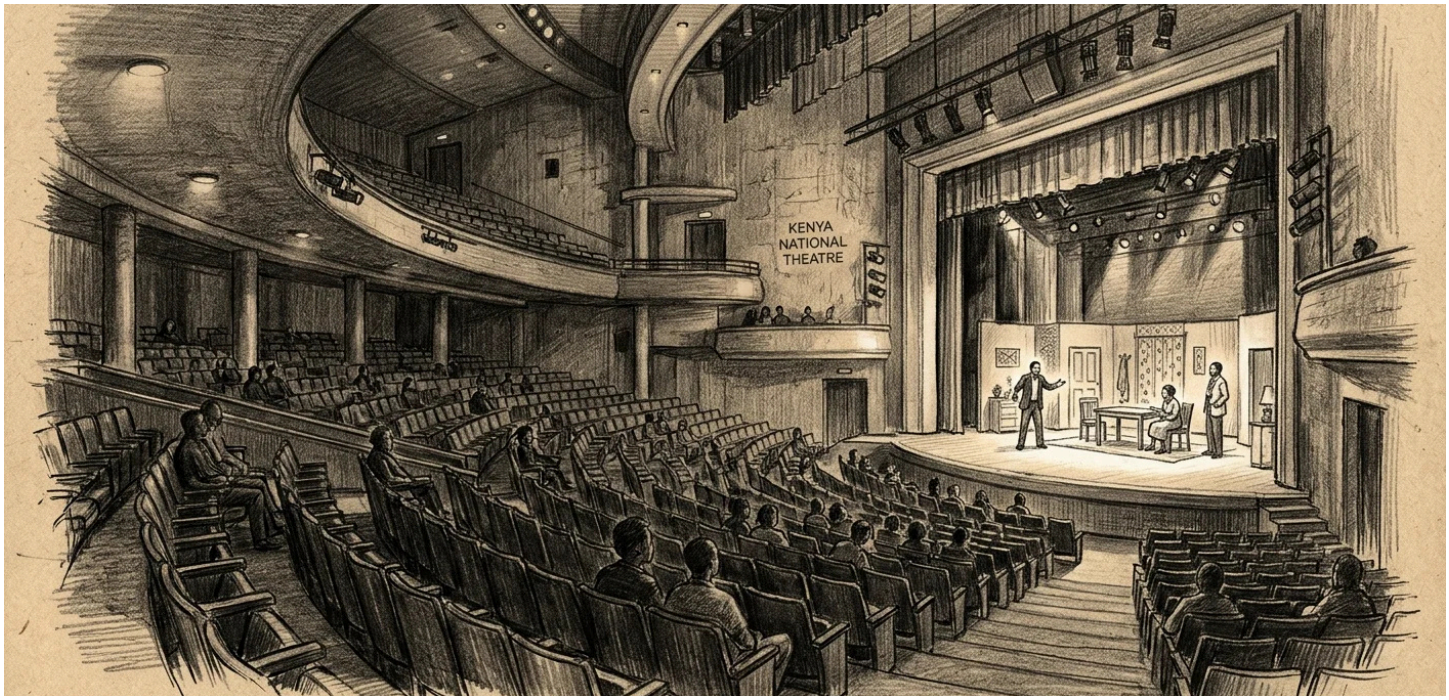
M-PESA's pricing is another strategic consideration: with 53 per cent of all transactions and about 81 per cent of merchant transactions free, growth must increasingly come from transaction volume, merchant services, credit, and the wider financial ecosystem — not higher fees for everyday transfers.

Safaricom's first-half performance is therefore a story of two different businesses moving in complementary directions: a mature Kenyan operation generating consistent earnings and an Ethiopian operation reducing the financial burden of its expansion.

The combination has produced impressive group profit growth, but investors should watch the quality and repeatability of that growth.

The second half will show whether Ethiopia's improvement is sustained or driven by shrinking losses, whether Kenya can sustain double-digit earnings growth amid pressured household budgets, and whether the expanding digital ecosystem can turn engagement into lasting returns.

Kenyan theatre's real shortage is audience, not shows



Kenya's theatre industry faces a curious contradiction: stages are busy, productions are growing, international performers are visiting Nairobi, and festivals are becoming more ambitious. Yet one question remains: who is watching?

The 11th Kenya International Theatre Festival (KITFest), running November 4–15 at the Kenya National Theatre, explores the industry's promise and challenges. Under the theme "Reimagining Theatre", it features 48 global performances, including plays, dance, physical comedy, poetry, puppetry and experimental work.

But the festival's significance lies not only in its productions or international reach. The larger question is whether Kenya can build a broad, diverse audience that sustains theatre beyond the festival calendar.

Producing excellent plays, nurturing talent and hosting international festivals do not automatically create a public that regularly pays to see live performance. Kenya's next stage of development may depend less on what happens on stage than on who can afford a seat in the auditorium.

A Growing Industry With An Audience Problem

Kenya's theatre ecosystem is more active than often assumed. The Kenya National Theatre and other venues host year-round productions, while independent companies, schools, universities and cultural organisations develop new work.

The Kenya Cultural Centre's March 2025 newsletter reported 321 shows at the National Theatre last year, involving at least 1,072 crew and drawing 33,790 attendees. Performances generated Sh25.3 million for artists, while theatre activities across 63 nationwide venues extended the ecosystem beyond Nairobi.

These figures show theatre's role in employment and the economy, but raise questions. The annual audience averages about 105 people per show, though the data does not reveal unique attendees, venue capacity, differences between productions or whether audiences return.

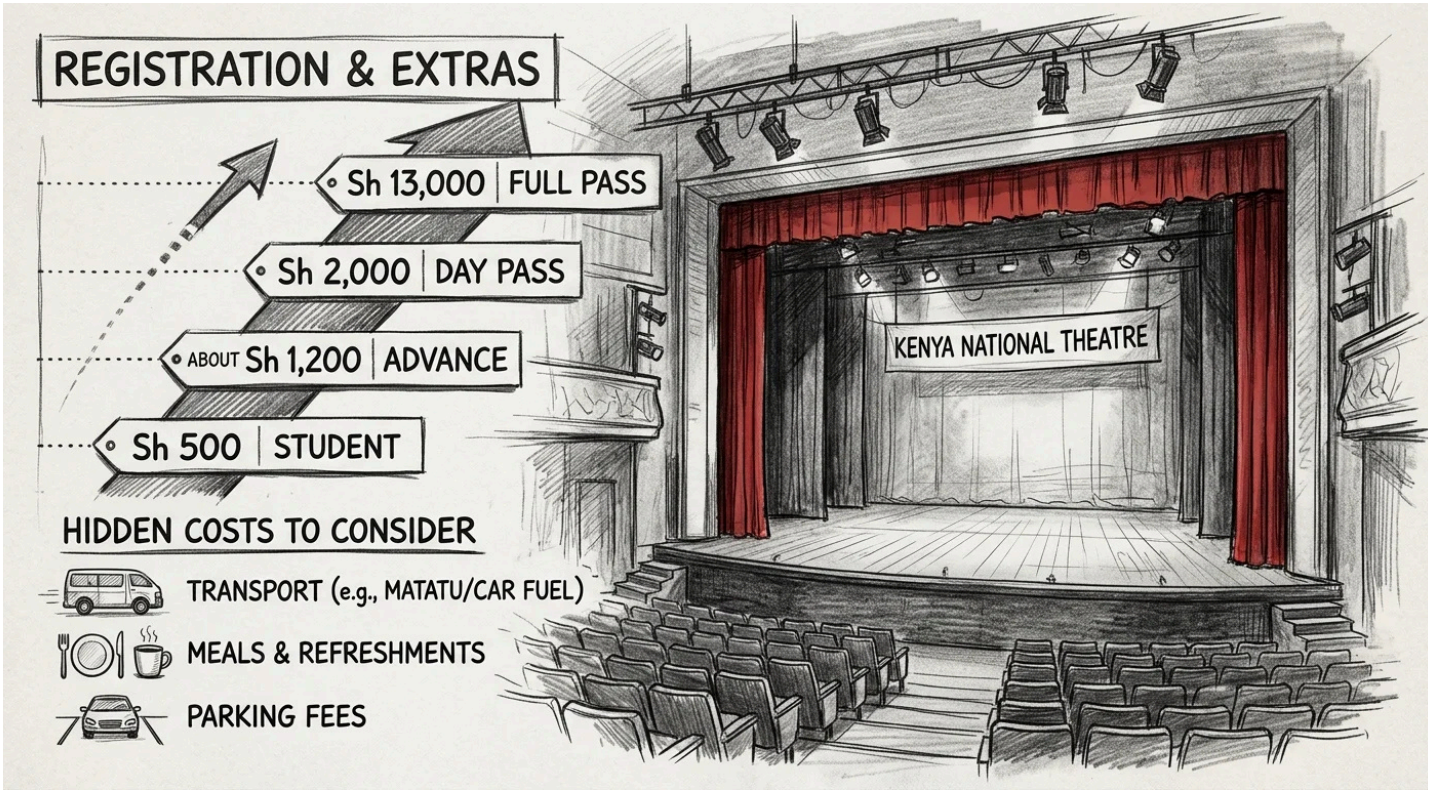
That distinction matters: a sustainable industry needs repeat customers, predictable demand and year-round spending.

Despite the festival's growth and international ambitions, audiences remained relatively narrow, with many students and theatre practitioners; some performances drew few people. The industry cannot address this simply by staging more shows.

The Price Of Taking A Seat

The cost of attending theatre is central to the conversation, but affordability must be considered alongside how Kenyans spend their leisure time.

At KITFest 2026, student tickets generally start at Sh500, while advance tickets for many productions cost about Sh1,200.



Prices vary by production; festival passes range from Sh2,000 for a day to Sh13,000 for all paid performances.

These options create entry points for students and audiences attending multiple shows, but theatre still competes for limited household leisure budgets. Tickets are only part of the cost: transport, meals, parking and time add to the expense for families, couples and groups.

The challenge grows when theatre is seen as an occasional cultural outing rather than accessible entertainment. Cinema, television, streaming, music, comedy and digital content offer competing ways to spend leisure time — often with easier access, less planning and the option to stay home.

Theatre offers a distinctive live, shared experience, but that alone cannot secure a repeat audience. It must be attractive, accessible and relevant.

Geography matters, too: venues concentrated in central Nairobi can exclude people in satellite towns and lower-income neighbourhoods, where travel costs and inconvenience create further barriers, especially for young audiences.

To grow its audience, the industry must consider not just what people pay, but where they must go.

Taking Theatre Beyond The Traditional Audience

One of KITFest 2026's most interesting developments is its effort to bring theatre to people traditionally excluded.

The festival's "Raise the Curtain: 2,000 First Seats" campaign invites people who have never experienced theatre into the auditorium.

It allocates 1,500 seats to children from under-resourced schools, homes and communities such as Kibera, Kawangware and Korogocho. The initiative also aims to improve access for blind and deaf audiences and people with mobility challenges.

Audience development cannot rely on ticket sales alone. It requires investment in introducing new people to theatre and making performances accessible.

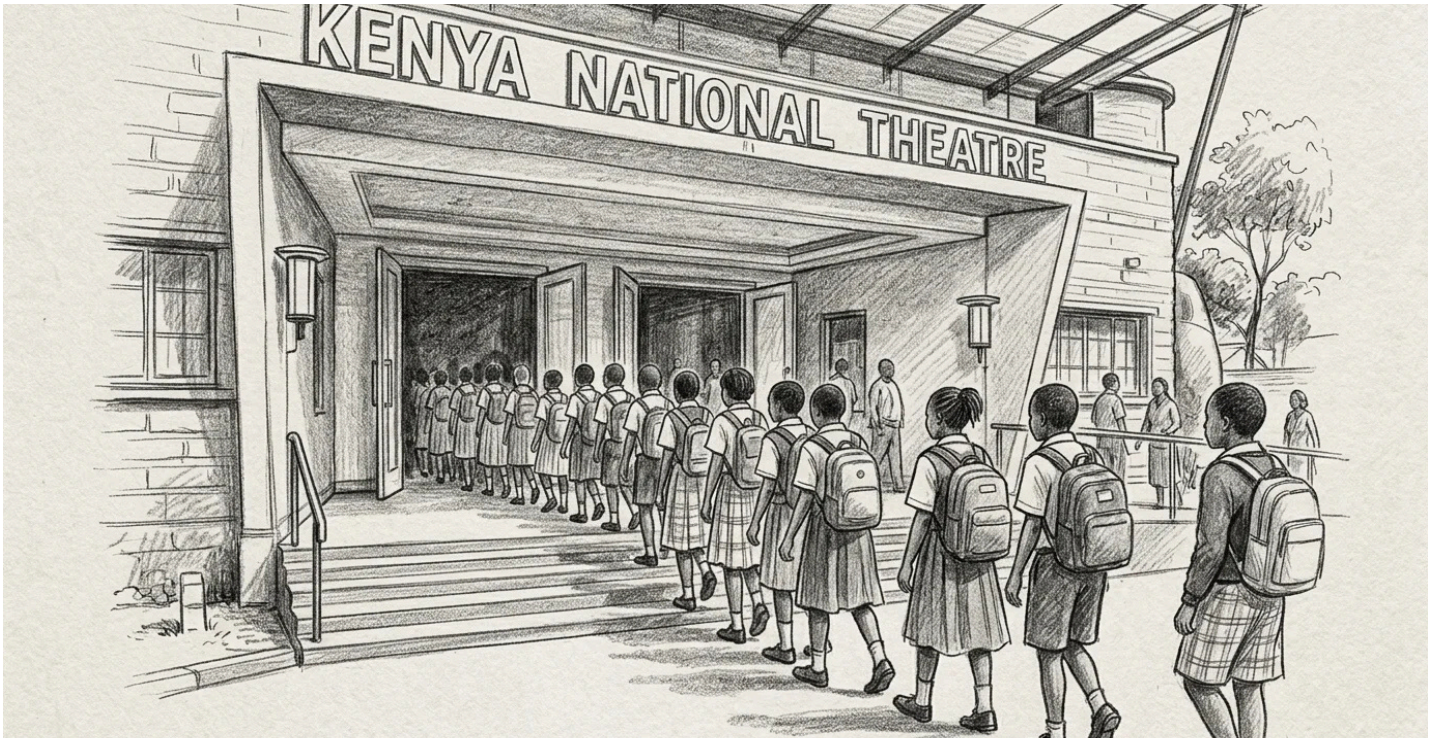
A child's first visit may spark a lasting interest, and schools can support this by integrating theatre into learning, arranging visits and involving students in productions.

But one festival performance is only a start. A school culture of regularly watching, discussing and performing theatre can have a deeper impact.

County festivals, touring productions, community performances and partnerships with local cultural institutions could build audiences nationwide.

The Kenya Cultural Centre's recognition of theatre activity at 63 venues offers a foundation for a more distributed industry. The challenge is to link these spaces with regular programming, local audiences and viable production models.

Theatre should not have to wait for an international festival to become visible.



The Business Behind The Performance

Audience questions are inseparable from theatre economics: productions must cover creative, technical, venue, marketing, rehearsal and operating costs before generating sustainable returns.

Independent companies face major risks: even favourable reviews may not generate enough ticket sales to cover costs. Sponsorships, partnerships, education programmes, touring, commissions and licensing diversify revenue and reduce ticket dependence.

Alongside KITFest, the African Theatre Market brought artistic directors, producers, programmers and funders together to explore partnerships beyond individual performances.

The industry needs reliable audience data on who attends, how often, what draws newcomers, willingness to pay, and which communities are underserved. Without it, producers and sponsors rely on assumptions, not evidence.

Digital marketing can broaden reach, but cannot replace a clear audience-development strategy. The industry must understand what draws students, families, corporate audiences, tourists and regular theatre-goers—and show why live performance merits attention amid competing entertainment options.

Building A Culture, Not Just A Festival

Kenya's theatre industry has shown it can mount ambitious productions, attract international participants and create platforms for local artists. KITFest's 11-year history demonstrates the commitment needed to sustain such work. The industry's future, however, depends on building a broader relationship with the public.

This requires action from multiple players. Government and cultural institutions must support accessible venues, arts education and regional infrastructure. Schools and universities should treat theatre as more than an extracurricular activity.

Producers need quality work that speaks to diverse audiences, while sponsors should consider long-term investment in the creative economy, not just one-off festival partnerships.

The industry must also address relevance. Kenyan audiences should see their experiences, languages, histories, conflicts and aspirations onstage. International productions and exchanges enrich theatre, but local work must remain rooted in its society.

In a country with a rich storytelling tradition and a young population, theatre need not remain niche. The challenge is turning that heritage into a sustainable bond between performers and audiences.

KITFest closes on November 15. The productions will end, visiting performers will leave, and the festival's temporary burst of cultural activity will disperse. The harder work is building audiences for future productions, seasons and generations of performers.

Kenyan theatre is alive. The question is whether enough people have the opportunity, reason and incentive to take part.

The new generation of girls who are changing Kenyan sport



Kenya has never lacked sporting talent, but it has struggled to build systems that turn talent into lasting opportunity. That makes the Rising Lionesses' historic victory at the Dakar 2026 Youth Olympic Games especially significant.

On November 3, Kenya's under-18 women's rugby sevens team beat Australia 17–12 in a golden-point finish, becoming the first African nation to win Olympic or Youth Olympic rugby sevens gold — and Kenya's first Youth Olympic gold in a team sport.

Mitchelle Chemtai scored the decisive extra-time try, completing a comeback. After Kenya fell behind, Josephine Kerubo levelled the score, and Diana Wanjiku converted to force extra time.

The win showed the team could recover and compete under pressure: Australia had beaten Kenya 17–5 earlier in the tournament. Even more striking, World Rugby reported that several players had taken up rugby only about a year earlier.

In a country known for athletics and men's rugby, this achievement shows talent can emerge anywhere when young people have opportunities to participate and grow. It also raises an urgent question: what happens next?

From A Historic Medal To A Sustainable Pathway

Kenya's sporting reputation has largely been built on individual achievement.

Kenya's distance runners have made it an athletics powerhouse, while Shujaa, the men's rugby sevens team, has raised Kenyan rugby's international profile.

For girls, moving into organised sport can be difficult because of financial pressures, poor facilities, social expectations, and limited competition.

This challenge spans Kenyan sport: talented young women compete in athletics, football, basketball, volleyball, hockey and other disciplines, but visibility and commercial support remain uneven.

Celebrating medal winners without supporting their continued development risks making achievement a one-off moment.

The Rising Lionesses show that young Kenyan women can succeed in international youth sport, even against nations with stronger rugby systems. But one tournament victory does not prove the structures for sustained success are in place.

The real test is moving from junior to senior competition.

Athletes need regular competition, qualified coaches, suitable facilities, medical and sports-science support, financial assistance, and pathways that let them train while continuing their education or livelihoods.



The Opportunity Beyond Rugby

Dakar's victory came as women's rugby gains momentum in Kenya. Nairobi hosted the 2026 Rugby Africa Women's Sevens Championship at the RFUEA Grounds on November 7–8, featuring 11 nations. The Kenya Lionesses are also seeking a return to the HSBC SVNS 3 pathway.

The junior and senior teams are distinct, and junior success will endure only if players have a clear progression route.

This requires more than national selection: domestic competitions, school and university participation, club structures, coach development and sustainable funding.

The challenge extends beyond rugby. Kenyan women's sports have often lacked investment and commercial attention commensurate with their achievements.

Women's football, for example, faces inconsistent domestic structures and limited resources to develop and retain players. Across other disciplines, professional opportunities remain scarce relative to participation.

Visibility also matters. Media coverage, broadcasting and sponsorship shape which sports attract investment and make athletes commercially attractive.

Limited coverage of women's competitions can hinder their ability to build audiences and attract partners.

This creates a cycle that sporting institutions, sponsors, and broadcasters must confront: limited investment weakens competition quality and visibility, while low visibility is used to justify withholding investment.

Building a System Around the Girls

Dakar's success should prompt a wider examination of how Kenya identifies and develops female sporting talent.

Schools are a key entry point to organised sport, especially for children without access to private academies or specialised facilities. But participation alone is not enough. Schools need qualified coaches, safe facilities, equipment and competitions that help talented athletes advance beyond occasional inter-school tournaments.

National federations must establish clear pathways by identifying promising athletes early, investing in coaching and technical expertise, holding regular competitions and supporting players' transition to senior sport.

Financial support is just as vital. Training, travel, nutrition, equipment and medical care cost money. Without scholarships, stipends or institutional backing, athletes from low-income households may struggle to continue.

Sponsors can look beyond short-term partnerships with successful national teams. Investing in grassroots programmes, girls' leagues, school competitions and athlete development would build a stronger foundation for success.



Government also has a role. Sporting infrastructure should be judged not just by stadiums built or international events hosted, but by young people's access to facilities, the availability of qualified coaches, and whether investment sustains participation and competition.

Progress should be measured by the strength of the pathway, not just medals.

The Next Generation Needs More Than Applause

The Rising Lionesses have returned to a hero's welcome, rightly celebrating a major achievement for Kenyan sport and inspiring girls to consider rugby and other competitive sports.

But inspiration begins the work; it does not finish it. Kenya can build on the team's success to strengthen women's rugby and to rethink girls' and women's place in sport.

That requires confronting questions of funding, facilities, coaching, access, professional opportunities and institutional support for women's competitions.

It also means looking beyond national-team athletes to the many girls who could participate if opportunities were available.

Kenya's sporting future depends not only on celebrating champions but on creating pathways for young people to develop, compete and earn a sustainable living through sport.

The girls who transformed Kenyan rugby in Dakar showed what is possible.

Now institutions, federations, schools, sponsors and government must ensure their achievement becomes a foundation, not an exception.

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President William Ruto and First Lady Mama Rachel during the wedding celebration of their daughter, Charlene, and Isaya Yunge at malaika beach hotel in Mwanza, Tanzania.

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