

Unlocking Investment Opportunities in Kenya's Indigenous Wealth A New Growth Area of The Economy

Date: 21st - 23rd April 2026

Venue: Murang'a County

OVERVIEW

The National Government, through the Natural Products Industry (NPI) Program of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), within the Ministry of Gender, Culture and Children Services, is implementing a major agenda to promote **Heritage-Based Enterprises**. This initiative is one of the key thematic areas in NMK's Strategic Plan (2023–2027) and aligns with Kenya's Vision 2030 Fourth Medium-Term Plan (2023–2027) and the Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA) strategy.

NMK's NPI Program aims at harnessing the potential of Kenya's natural products industry. The development of this sub-sector is based on the concept of leveraging indigenous knowledge systems to drive market-oriented innovations, supported by scientific research and business expertise to create home-grown products. This approach seeks to integrate indigenous knowledge and technologies into the knowledge economy through their documentation, protection and promotion as strategic resources for national development. In doing so, it will serve as a key enabler of the Heritage-Based Enterprises agenda.

Pursuant to this agenda, the government has funded the documentation and digitization of indigenous knowledge intellectual assets (IKIAs) through the **Indigenous Knowledge Documentation and Digitization (IK DoDi) Project**, targeting different local communities in 13 pilot counties: Garissa, Kakamega, Kericho, Kilifi, Kisii, Makueni, Marsabit, Murang'a, Narok, Siaya, Tharaka Nithi, Turkana and Vihiga. This forms Phase 1 of the project, while Phases 2 and 3 will cover 20 and 14 counties, respectively. This knowledge is archived and protected for posterity in a system dubbed the **Indigenous Knowledge Innovation Bank (InKiBank)**, with its primary host being the county governments.

The establishment of the InKiBank was a major achievement of Phase 1. It serves as a unique platform for granting access and user rights to interested users, facilitating the negotiation of benefit-sharing with local communities and acting as **Kenya's indigenous knowledge intellectual assets protection system**.

Investment Conference and Trade Fair

To advance the heritage-based enterprises agenda, the 1st International Investment Conference and Trade Fair on indigenous knowledge intellectual assets is scheduled to take place in Murang'a County in April 2026. The theme of the event is **"Unlocking Investment Opportunities in Kenya's Indigenous Wealth: A New Growth Area of the Economy"**.

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As part of vital preparatory activities for the upcoming 1st International Investment Conference and Trade Fair, County Governments, in consultation with indigenous knowledge intellectual assets owners, have **prioritized documented assets** with potential to be showcased at the event. A comprehensive **feasibility study** has been undertaken to determine the commercial viability of each of these assets.

Furthermore, NMK, in partnership with the Kenya Copyright Board, the Kenya Industrial Property Institute, Moi University and Meru University of Science and Technology, has conducted a thorough **Intellectual Property (IP) audit** of the documented and prioritized Indigenous Knowledge Intellectual Assets. This effort aims to safeguard the IP rights of indigenous knowledge asset owners and other stakeholders.

In addition, under the leadership and guidance of the Kenya Bureau of Standards, NMK, in collaboration with other stakeholders, is developing **product standards and certification** guidelines for the prioritized indigenous knowledge intellectual assets. This effort seeks to address one of the key challenges associated with commercialisation of heritage-based products - lack of standardization.

This premier and groundbreaking event aims to spotlight Kenya's diverse indigenous knowledge intellectual assets, which have undergone IP audits, standardization, and commercial viability assessments. These assets are presented under the following **sub-themes**: traditional foods and local cuisines for enhanced nutrition and food security, performing arts for the creative economy, heritage sites for cultural tourism, indigenous technologies for industrialization, traditional medicines for one-health and Kenya's indigenous knowledge intellectual assets *sui generis* protection system.

At the event, indigenous knowledge asset owners will have the opportunity to showcase their assets and innovations and to discuss with potential investors, opportunities for partnership in product development and commercialization.

This inaugural event will highlight the vast potential of heritage-based enterprises to catalyze inclusive socio-economic transformation and contribute to the attainment of the Government's Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA).

OBJECTIVES

- To raise awareness of the potential of heritage-based enterprises in socio-economic and cultural development
- To demonstrate the Government's goodwill and gain investors' buy-in
- To achieve investment commitments and create new business opportunities
- To commission Kenya's indigenous knowledge intellectual assets *sui generis* protection system.

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SUB-THEMES

I Traditional Foods and Local Cuisine for Enhanced Nutrition & Food Security

Traditional Kenyan foods are well known for their high nutritional value, unique flavor and diversity. These delicacies are prepared in various ways informed by the rich indigenous knowledge of Kenyan communities. They include traditional beverages (such as traditional teas, fermented porridges and alcoholic beverages), vegetables, mushrooms, roots and tubers, fruits, meats and edible insects. Many of these have potential for commercialisation, and a few prioritised ones will be featured in this event. The exceptionally high nutritional value of some foods renders them candidates for use in food clinics, beyond home and restaurant settings, to address key gaps in nutrition and health. Such an initiative will significantly contribute to the promotive and preventive health care and wellness approaches pursued by the Ministry of Health as a key pillar in healthcare. The current initiative to mainstream the consumption of African indigenous vegetables in schools is part of this strategy to promote the health and well-being of learners.

II Performing Arts and Creative Economy

This sub-theme features the diversity of music, song, dance, storytelling and indigenous sports of different Kenyan communities that reflect their identity, lifestyles, traditional rites of passage and other ceremonial events. Some of the songs are instrumental. They may be used for edutainment, ceremonial and motivational purposes. Due to the versatility of music, dance and traditional sports, they transcend generations and can be adapted to appeal to modern tastes while retaining their cultural significance. The melodious nature of songs and the choreography in dance have potential for commercialisation in entertainment, advertisement and recreation. It is proposed to link these unique and diverse indigenous knowledge intellectual assets to the 'Talanta Hela' initiative and contribute to advancing the creative economy, which is increasingly becoming the mainstay for many in Kenya.

III Heritage Sites and Cultural Tourism

Kenyan heritage sites are diverse but, in all cases, part of the local people's culture, landscape, history, architecture and traditions. Combined with other forms of cultural heritage, such as food, songs and dance and traditional attire, they have the potential to grow the tourism sector immensely.

At the conference and trade fair, prioritised heritage sites will be featured through audiovisual exhibitions. The exhibition theme will cover sacred sites, monuments, historic buildings, ancient ruins, and culturally significant landscapes of natural and cultural value. Heritage sites will be promoted as one-stop shops showcasing a people's heritage. In particular, the heritage sites will serve as the backbone around which cultural tourism and interconnected socio-economic activities shall flourish. The interconnected activities shall be based on the following indigenous assets: artisanal crafts, indigenous cuisine, traditional medicine, indigenous sports, storytelling, poetry, music & dance, traditional attire, religious practices and community governance structures. The concept of experiential homestays shall also be promoted by harnessing indigenous knowledge assets and contributing to the diversification of the national tourism menu.

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IV Indigenous Technologies for Industrialisation

This sub-theme will focus on indigenous knowledge and technical know-how developed by local communities to solve challenges of a technological nature and tailor them into local industrialisation initiatives. These indigenous technologies span various sectors such as indigenous culinary techniques, artisanal crafts, traditional architecture, indigenous food preservation technologies, traditional remedies, indigenous attire and others. Besides their commercial potential, there is an increasing demand to use these indigenous technologies as part of the concerted efforts and strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation. Harnessing of heritage-based enterprises, in general, and indigenous technologies, in particular, will contribute significantly to the establishment of cottage industries through partnership between micro, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs (MSMES) and strategic partners. This initiative will also leverage the county aggregation industrial parks.

V Traditional Medicine for One-Health

The enactment of the Health Act 2017 incorporated alternative and complementary medicines into Kenya's healthcare systems. This is in line with the World Health Organization's estimates of up to 80% of people in low- and middle-income countries relying on traditional remedies, particularly plant-based therapies, due to cultural acceptance, accessibility and affordability. Although these traditional remedies are used to manage a wide spectrum of health conditions, including infectious and chronic diseases, their vast potential for upscaling into mainstream healthcare is curtailed due to a lack of documented data on safety and efficacy. This event aims to provide a platform to link potential investors and researchers with indigenous knowledge intellectual asset holders.

Targeted pre-clinical and clinical research on the prioritized herbal products is therefore essential for developing improved, evidence-based products and services. Such work will bridge the gap between traditional use and biomedical standards, fostering trust, safety, innovation and scalability of natural health solutions.

VI Kenya's Indigenous Knowledge Intellectual Assets *sui generis* Protection System

This theme features the Indigenous Knowledge Management System (IKMS) developed by Kenyan computer experts for documentation and digitisation of community Indigenous Knowledge and Intellectual Assets (IKIAs). This documentation is a form of Intellectual Property (IP) protection termed *sui generis* system recognised by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and the Swakopmund Protocol on the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expressions. This system features specialised modules to document biodata, cultural expressions, and genetic resources, and govern public access. The IKMS and the Indigenous Knowledge Information Bank (InKiBank / IKIA repository) will enable respectful investor engagement through a structured access workflow – from national to county to community.

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EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- I. Enhanced visibility, investment and trade in heritage-based enterprises
- II. Strengthened networks between government, investors, researchers, MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) and indigenous wealth owners
- III. Business commitments for wealth and job creation
- IV. Informed policy interventions to enable promotion of heritage-based enterprises
- V. Inkibank commissioned for use by researchers and investors in a formalised way.

