Global Gateway

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MARKUP II

EU-EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme Phase II

NEWSLETTER 11 | 2026

DEAR READER, WE ARE PLEASED TO PRESENT THE LATEST EDITION OF THE EU-EAC MARKUP II NEWSLETTER.

Faces of MARKUP II

SUMSERON COFFEE: KENYA'S FIRST SHIPMENT OF GREEN COFFEE TO ITALY

In July 2026, a number stakeholders including the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNCCI), Kenya's State Department for Trade and EU-EAC MARKUP II, gathered to flag off Kenya's first shipment of green coffee to Italy. Amounting to 20 containers, the shipment marks a landmark moment for Kenya, and for the thousands of coffee SMEs across the country working towards international market access.

The shipment also represents the culmination of decades of work from Sumseron Coffee, and from John Seroney, the founder at the helm of the SME. For John, this moment carries great bearing. His father started their family's coffee legacy back in 1978, over five decades ago.



"Whenever I think about that, I think about the struggles, the challenges my dad went through. The sleepless nights." The struggle, John says, was never just about his own family. ***"It's a representation of thousands and thousands of other families working so hard on the coffee farm – to make sure their families get something to put on the table."***

This conviction sharply shapes how Sumseron Coffee operates today. The SME's foundation is in ethical sourcing, working closely with youth, women and cooperatives across Kenya's growing coffee regions. *"You cannot detach us from impact"*, John explains, *"we value where the coffee comes from, who the producers are. We don't just sell coffee for the sake of it."*

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION – MARKUP II'S ROLE IN SUMSERON COFFEE

"MARKUP II has played a very vital role for Sumseron Coffee" John explains, *"Ever since I joined MARKUP II, we've seen tremendous growth – right from aligning our structured into a company that has systems."* MARKUP II's support has extended to strengthening Sumseron's brand visibility, and supporting with building the tools needed to tell a credible, traceable coffee story to international buyers.

Export-readiness training walked Sumseron through the full journey; from documentation and compliance to export logistics and shipment – while access to finance training helped the company understand the level of capital needed before a company can export internationally.

In 2024, MARKUP II supported Sumseron's participation in World of Coffee Copenhagen; an experience that John credits with reshaping how the company thinks about the European market. *"That opened up our mind to what the European market wants with regards to requirements, compliance and procedures."*

With regards to bringing the Trieste shipment together, John points out that it took coordinated efforts across an entire value chain; export and logistics partners like Mitchell Cotts, standardization entity Kenya Bureau of Standards and the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce.

"The biggest challenge for export is always compliance, logistics, and raw materials", John reflects. ***"What made it easier was partnership and collaboration."***

What Comes Next

For John, the Trieste shipment is just the beginning. *"Our entry to Europe through Italy is not just the first shipment... We're focused on the repeat containers – building trust especially with the buyer."* Beyond Italy, Sumseron is already looking toward France, Sweden and the wider European market, betting that satisfied buyers will amplify Sumseron to other buyers across the European coffee market.

His last reflections to budding entrepreneurs in the coffee space; *"For any SME who intends to scale, technical expertise is needed, capacity building is needed, training is needed."* And a structured program like MARKUP II has contributed directly to Sumseron's ability to scale.

Hear directly from John through this interview:

SOUTH SUDAN'S GUM ARABIC BELT: TWO ENTREPRENEURS, ONE JOURNEY IN RESILIENCE

South Sudan sits on one of Africa's largest reserves of gum arabic; the acacia belt stretches across roughly 4.6 million hectares in eight states, though today production is really only active in two, Upper Nile and Northern Bahr el Ghazal. That gap between potential and practice is the space both Precise Enterprise Limited and Nile Organic Limited are working in, from different starting points and, notably, led by very different founders. What connects their stories isn't just gum arabic; it's a shared commitment to building the systems (standards, traceability, buyer trust) that turn a raw resource into a real export sector, with MARKUP II showing up as a consistent partner in that work.

Precise Enterprise Limited

When Precise Enterprise's Founder, Mr. Sabit Asholi looked into the gum arabic sector globally, he was surprised to find that a significant share of global exports of the product actually originate from South Sudan. That initial realization sparked his interest in the sector, but was served as the foundation was the awareness of the sector's "potential to contribute meaningfully to socioeconomic growth in South Sudan."

Precise Enterprise has since grown into one of the country's more established gum arabic exporters, sourcing through collection points and warehouses that reach into Renk and Aweil; exactly the two states where South Sudan's production is currently concentrated.

Mr. Asholi is careful not to let that growth read as arrival rather than responsibility: ***"This shows that we are moving in the right direction, but it also reminds us of the responsibility we have to maintain a reliable supply chain, continue serving our customers to the highest standard, and grow the business in a sustainable way."***



MARKUP II's support showed up across three concrete threads in his account. A benchmarking mission to Chad in October 2025 gave Precise Enterprise and other South Sudanese exporters direct exposure to a more mature gum arabic export system ; cooperative management, quality certification, value addition, that Asholi sees as a model worth adapting locally.

Through MARKUP II's Quality Champions Programme, a coach worked directly with his team on food safety and hygiene practices, with tangible results: staff now more consistently use protective gear, keep processing areas clean, and apply lean principles to cut waste and costs. And at Food Ingredients Paris 2025, pre-event training on marketing and branding helped the team pitch more effectively to international buyers. This trip also led directly to a new supply deal with an international client.

Asholi's advice to other South Sudanese entrepreneurs considering agribusiness stays focused on the scale of potential: with production active in only two of eight potential states, he sees gum arabic as a way to build "reliable income opportunities" and "strengthen community resilience" well beyond where the sector currently reaches, and invites others to help "establish South Sudan as a global leader in gum arabic exports."



Nile Organic Limited

Agol Kuc's journey with Nile Organic Limited, starts with a conviction she had to prove on her own terms.



As a woman founder in what she describes plainly as *"a traditionally male-dominated sector,"* she says credibility wasn't handed to her; it had to be *"established through competence, consistency and results."* Her case for building Nile Organic rests on a read of untapped potential: South Sudan and the wider African gum belt produce some of the world's finest quality gum arabic, and the real gap isn't the product, it's everything around it *"building an organized supply chain, meeting international standards and connecting producers to markets where the product is valued."*

MARKUP II's role in that effort has been substantive by Agol's account. MARKUP II's work fed directly into South Sudan's National Export and Investment Strategy for the gum arabic sector and supported the National Standards Bureau in drafting a regional standard and code of practice for harvesting, handling, processing, and storage; sector-level support that a single company couldn't build alone. Closer to the ground, MARKUP II provided Nile Organic with specialised gum arabic tapping tools, a small but practical intervention aimed squarely at improving quality and efficiency where harvesting actually happens. And like Precise Enterprise, Nile Organic took part in the Chad benchmarking visit and Food Ingredients Paris, which Agol Kuc credits with building "valuable buyer relationships" with major global gum arabic purchasers.

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Asked about the experience of actually reaching EU and East African buyers, her answer resists any suggestion that demand alone is the requirement: ***"international buyers are looking for reliability... For an emerging exporter, building that confidence takes time."*** In closing, Agol sees success as something beyond her own company; ***"my ambition goes beyond building one company - it is about demonstrating that a South Sudanese enterprise can connect local production to international markets while creating greater value for the communities within the supply chain."***

THE COCOA COOPERATIVES SHAPING UGANDA'S COCOA SECTOR: BWAMBA COOPERATIVE UNION & RWENZORI YOUTH COCOA PRODUCERS COOPERATIVE

Bundibugyo District, tucked against the Rwenzori Mountains in Uganda's west, has become the heart of the cocoa industry, now producing over 70% of the country's cocoa from smallholder farms. Ugandan cocoa is also prized internationally for its fine flavour, but its products have still not fully broken through into international markets.



That's the exact problem Bwamba Cooperative Union (BCU) was built to solve. Formed by cocoa farmers in Bundibugyo, BCU's founding logic was straightforward: farmers selling alone were exposed to price fluctuation, middlemen who captured most of the margin, poor post-harvest handling that cost them quality premiums, and climate shocks like floods and landslides they had no way to plan around individually. The union's answer was to organize; today BCU counts more than 60 affiliate cooperatives under it, mobilized in response to real, growing buyer demand for cocoa beans, with BCU itself supporting each one through registration with Uganda's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives. One of those affiliates is Rwenzori Nduguto Youth Cocoa Producers Cooperative, and its account, gives a ground-level view of what that union operations actually looks like day to day.

For Bwambale Kasindi General Manager at Rwenzori Cooperative, entrepreneurship is plainly "the art of creating and maintaining opportunities for survival," and building the cooperative demanded, in his words, commitment, trust, hope, sacrifice, and professionalism. BCU's role in that has been concrete: training Rwenzori Nduguto's members in cooperative leadership and governance, post-harvest handling, good agronomic practices, and climate-smart agriculture since the cooperative began selling through the Union in 2021.

The payoff of that structure shows up in BCU's export numbers. Collective marketing which involves bulking produce from dozens of primary cooperatives into large, consistent volumes; is what gives BCU real bargaining power with international buyers in a way no single farmer or even single cooperative could manage alone.

MARKUP II's contribution sits inside that growth rather than apart from it. On the union side, engagement has meant support connecting to trade fairs and buyers and strengthening the export pipeline that turns bulked cocoa into fulfilled contracts. On the primary-cooperative side, Mr.Bwambale is specific about what changed for Rwenzori Cooperative: access to finance that let the cooperative "mobilize more resources, and support collecting farmer and farm-level data for traceability." MARKUP II also helped the cooperative develop an Export Business Plan to guide its trade going forward. Taken together, he says simply, the engagement "made me run the cooperative professionally."

Both men land on the same closing point from their own vantage: that the cooperative model is the thing worth understanding here, not just the cocoa. BCU's message to other farmer groups is that organizing solves a problem money alone can't: "even without working capital, the cooperative is able to bulk and sell their produce relying on the power of many farmers," and organized groups are simply easier for NGOs and government to work with and lobby alongside. Mr.Bwambale's message is aimed more at young people weighing whether agriculture is a real career path at all. He reminds us: *"agriculture is the backbone of our economy."*

Market Linkage

MARKUP II AT WORLD OF COFFEE BRUSSELS 2026



From June 25th – 27th 2026, MARKUP II joined World of Coffee, Europe's largest specialty coffee event; for its debut edition in Brussels.

MARKUP II supported SMEs this year through access to a booth that allowed participating businesses to showcase their products to international buyers. Under this initiative, about 20 MARKUP II-supported SMEs were able to exhibit including Burundi's Kawasili and Kenya's Sakami Coffee.

Sakami Coffee, is a woman-led agribusiness and long-time participant of MARKUP II's capacity-building programmes; including marketing and branding support, coffee roasting training, access to finance and market linkage through participation in World of Coffee 2024 and 2025.

Founder Gloria Gummerus hosted a producers' cupping workshop in this year's edition to continue to build on the international partnerships she's cultivated over the past two years.

MARKUP II was also proud to support Uganda with the launch of their national coffee brand: **"Uganda Coffee: It's in our Nature."** The unveiling of Uganda's coffee brand marks a pointed shift in how Uganda is positioning itself in the international coffee market – as a home for distinct, premium origin coffee.



MARKUP II AT DAR ES SALAAM INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR, TANZANIA AND INTERPLAST PACK EAST AFRICA, KENYA

Packaging was the thread connecting two exhibitions that MARKUP II took part in this quarter; the 50th Dar es Salaam International Trade Fair (otherwise known as Saba Saba) held from 28th June 2026, and Interplast Pack East Africa, held in Nairobi from 20th – 22nd August 2026.

At the Dar es Salaam International Trade Fair, MARKUP II took part through a Business Clinic hosted within the Ministry of Industry and Trade Pavilion, alongside partner institutions including the Business Registration & Licensing Agency (BRELA), Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS), Tanzania Agricultural Development Bank (TADB), and the National Development Corporation (NDC). The business clinic gave visiting SMEs a single point of access to technical advice, regulatory guidance and market linkage support.

MARKUP II's both drew steady interest from SMEs across the spice, avocado, coffee and wider agribusiness sectors, all keen to understand how better packaging could open doors to new markers. The booth also attracted visits from Senior Tanzanian government officials; including from the Permanent Secretary and Minister of Industry of Trade Director Dr. Ashura Katunzi.

At Interplast Pack East Africa, MARKUP II carried the same message to a dedicated packaging-industry audience, across three days.

Across both events, one instrumental tool was amplified; the East African Packaging Directory, which connects SMEs with verified packaging manufacturers and service providers across the region. For many SMEs and packaging suppliers visiting the booth; this served as their first introduction to the Packaging Directory; and their feedback highlights the growing demand for practical packaging solutions that are responsive to SME needs.





MARKUP II AT THE AFRICA FOOD SYSTEMS FORUM, KIGALI 2026

From 31st August to 4th September 2026, Kigali hosted the 20th edition of the Africa Food Systems Forum (AFSF). Serving as the African continent's most significant annual convening on agriculture and food systems, AFSF brought together more than 5,000 delegates from over 50 countries under the theme Investing in Africa's Agri-Food Systems; Nourishing Nations, Growing Jobs, Building Resilience.

MARKUP II supported three Rwandan youth-led SMEs to attend; TRAPRO, Coffee Connect Centre and Kashlash Ltd; who are all participants of the MARKUP II Youth Agribusiness Accelerator. For these young agripreneurs, AFSF offered direct access to the investors, financial institutions and policymakers shaping the future of African agriculture.

For TRAPRO's COO Jean Pierre Niyigena, the Forum marked a genuine milestone.

"This was our first time attending. We participated in three Deal Room sessions, and attended general sessions on climate finance, partnerships and a dedicated session on the role financial institutions can play in designing products suited to farmers' irregular cash flows."



TRAPRO specifically operates a farmers-first model that provides coffee farmers with seedlings, financing and training, then buys and processes their harvest so more of the final export value reaches the people who truly grew it.

"What drove us to start TRAPRO was the historical disadvantage rural farmers were exposed to," explains Jean Pierre. Attending AFSF, gave TRAPRO's team unique access and vantage into the continental agricutural sector in Africa and its numerous stakeholders.



Looking forward, Jean shares that they've already started following up with the contacts they made in the rooms; opening TRAPRO up to new potential and funders.

For MARKUP II, TRAPRO's experience continues to reflect the commitment to empowering SMEs, including youth-led entities towards opportunities and linkages that can continue to raise their capacity as businesses.

Business Support



NATIONAL AWARENESS WORKSHOPS ON EPING, WTO TBT, AND SPS AGREEMENTS IN RWANDA, BURUNDI AND SOUTH SUDAN

There's a specific situation that plagues exporters from East Africa and beyond. For many of them; technical barriers to trade (TBT) including Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) requirements can make exporting a complex venture. How does this play out? Agricultural exporters; for example, need to carefully monitor maximum residue limits for pesticides to ensure that their produce is not rejected at the border. Monitoring this constantly can be a hassle; and that's where ePing comes in.

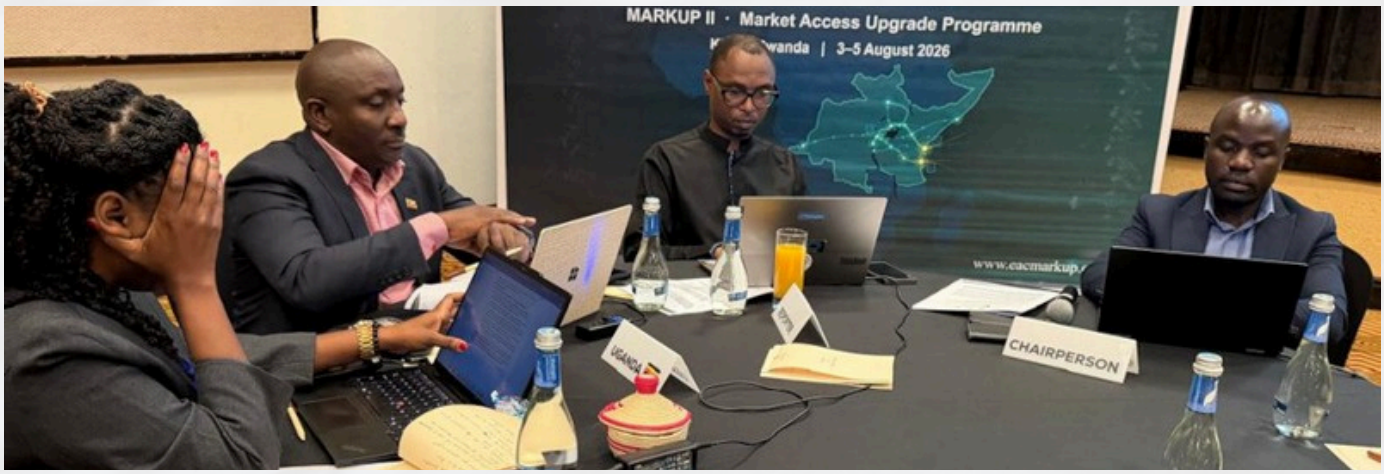
Jointly developed by the UN, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Trade Centre (ITC), ePing is a free online alert system that tracks every new or updated SPS and TBT regulation notified by WTO member countries. Instead of manually monitoring dozens of regulatory bodies across export markets, ePing lets businesses filter by product or market and get notified the moment something relevant changes.

In August 2026; three national-level workshops were organized under the MARKUP II programme in Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan to raise awareness among the public and private sector on the use of ePing. These sessions followed similar workshops already delivered in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya under the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) project.

Beyond simply introducing the tools, the workshops gave public and private sector participants a deeper understanding of their actual obligations under the SPS and TBT agreements; and a way to follow up on specific trade concerns as they arise.

EAC REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON PAPERLESS AND DIGITAL TRADE – RWANDA

The event brought together representatives from EAC member States, including customs administrations, ministries of trade and ICT, National Single Window operators, regional institutions, logistics associations, private sector organizations and development partners, to exchange experiences and identify practical solutions to accelerate trade digitalization.



Across the region, countries have made significant progress in modernizing trade procedures through National Single Windows, electronic certification systems and customs digitalization initiatives. However, challenges related to fragmented digital platforms, limited interoperability, and continued reliance on paper-based processes continue to affect the efficiency and cost of cross-border trade.

The Peer Learning Initiative provided a platform for participants to share national experiences, discuss emerging practices and explore approaches to strengthening cross-border data exchange, improving interoperability and promoting the mutual recognition of electronic trade documents.

A dedicated session on moving **"From Policy to Practice: Accelerating Digital Trade and Cross-Border Paperless Trade in East Africa",** featured a panel discussion to explore practical approaches for translating digital trade strategies into action.

Participants then developed national and regional action plans, identifying priority reforms, quick wins, and areas requiring regional coordination.

The initiative contributed to the identification of key recommendations and priority actions that will inform a regional roadmap on digital trade and paperless trade. The roadmap will be channeled through the EAC Secretariat to support coordination, monitoring, and follow-up implementation at the regional level.



REGIONAL LEATHER TRAINING WORKSHOP

In international markets, quality is in the details. This is particularly true for leather products such as bags, shoes and belts; buyers are often looking deeper to assess the stitching, edges and finish of the final good.

"If you don't have the right finishing, they are not buying – or they won't buy at the right price", explains Essangui Mbaitjongue, the international leatherwork trainer behind MARKUP II's regional leather manufacturing training. For East African leather SMEs hoping to compete internationally, that single detail, finishing, is often the difference between a product that sells and one that doesn't.



From July 21st – 25th 2026, MARKUP II in collaboration with the Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI), delivered a five-day regional training on leather bags and accessories manufacturing bringing together 25 participants from across East Africa. Training covered the technical skills that directly shape whether a finished product meets international standards; quality control, skiving, saddle stitching, prototyping and brand positioning.

For participants like Eric Chiza, CEO of Bandoh Leather Goods in Rwanda the training immensely raised his confidence as a business owner. *"This will make me comfortable to compete with other brands, even globally. Even if I am still on a small scale, now I'm confident that I can compete."*



Importantly, this training wasn't only about the participating SMEs. By also equipping 10 KIRDI technical staff, MARKUP II is anchoring leather expertise in an institution that will keep training East African leather SMEs for years to come. Watch snippets from the training here:

Sustainability

BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS MARKUP II'S VALUE CHAINS

For gum arabic producers in South Sudan; sustainability is not an abstract concept; it's a practice that ensures longevity. Gum arabic is harvested by tapping acacia trees for their resin, and how that tapping is done, and how well each surrounding acacia tree is managed, directly determines whether that tree, and that livelihood will still be productive in ten years time. This year, MARKUP II wove environmental sustainability directly into its value chain-work.

In South Sudan, 87 gum arabic producers, extension workers and supervisors received hands-on training in improved tapping, harvesting, post-harvest handling, quality control and critically the regeneration of acacia resources. The goal was to better connect product quality and market value with the long-term health of the natural resource base that makes it all possible. Across the wider MARKUP II programme, 49 MSMEs are now recorded as applying sustainable consumption and production practices, with resource efficiency, traceability, and improved production controls integrated directly into coaching.

Underpinning much of this work is ITC's Green Performance Toolkit; a free, online tool that helps small businesses assess and monitor their environmental performance across eight key areas; from energy and water use to waste management. This year, MARKUP II extended the toolkit's reach by training Business Support Organizations (BSOs) directly, in a Training of Trainers, designed to embed environmental performance into BSO's own ongoing work with SMEs.

Want to assess your own business's environmental performance? Explore the free Green Performance Toolkit:

Women & Youth



ADVANCING GENDER-RESPONSIVE COFFEE VALUE CHAINS: MARKUP II X ITC SHETRADES

Through its SheTrades Initiative, the MARKUP II project works with coffee SMEs and cooperatives to embed gender-responsive business practices across the coffee value chain. The approach combines enterprise coaching, the Gender Household Approach (GHA), capacity building, and organisational strengthening to promote women's economic empowerment while enhancing the competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of coffee businesses.

Working with coffee enterprises, cooperatives and farming households, the programme supports SMEs to strengthen gender-responsive governance, improve supplier engagement, collect sex-disaggregated data, promote women's participation as suppliers and decision-makers, and introduce family-friendly workplace practices. At household level, the Gender Household Approach encourages couples to plan together, make joint decisions, share responsibilities more equitably and manage coffee production as a shared enterprise. Together, these interventions contribute to improved farm productivity, stronger business performance and more inclusive coffee value chains where women can participate and benefit more equally.

ELGON COFFEE ENTERPRISES LIMITED

"Before participating in this training, I had failed to adopt Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). My coffee garden was poorly managed it was overgrown with weeds and yields kept declining. I attended the household training with my wife, and together we began applying what we had learned. We developed a joint household plan and shared responsibilities for the farm. We started weeding and monitoring the coffee garden together. What surprises many people is that the coffee garden is now healthier and more productive than ever before. The training helped us build a system where both husband and wife understood the work, planned together, and shared responsibilities. I now understand that when knowledge is shared and decisions are made jointly, the farm does not depend on one person."





"Annet Soyekwo Chekwemoi (in red), Managing Director of Elgon Coffee Enterprise Limited, with the coach and members of the company team following a coaching session. Elgon Coffee Enterprise has made encouraging progress in implementing the agreed Gender responsive actions. The company has strengthened its data management systems by updating supplier records, digitising coffee quality summaries, and introducing revised coffee delivery forms with joint spousal sign-off. Alongside these improvements, Elgon Coffee Enterprise has attracted new buyers, expanded its supplier base, and recorded increased participation of women delivering coffee to the company."

"Couples from Kaptoyoy Sub-county participate in a household planning exercise during a Gender Household Approach (GHA) training session facilitated by Elgon Coffee Enterprise Limited. The exercise enabled spouses to develop a shared vision for their household, identify common goals, and prepare joint action plans for managing their coffee enterprise, household resources, and family wellbeing. By promoting dialogue, shared decision-making, and collaborative planning, the session supports stronger household relationships and contributes to improved productivity and more sustainable coffee farming."

MT ELGON AGROFORESTRY COMMUNITY COOPERATIVE ENTERPRISES LIMITED (MEACCE)

"Members of Namanyonyi Shallom Cooperative, an affiliate of Mt. Elgon Agro Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Enterprise (MEACCE), participate in an interactive session on joint household planning and decision-making as part of the Gender Household Approach (GHA). Through facilitated discussions and practical exercises, participants explore the value of shared decision-making, equitable division of roles and responsibilities, and collaborative planning for household resources and coffee production. The session equips couples with practical skills to strengthen household relationships, improve farm management, and support more inclusive and resilient livelihoods."





"Couples from Namanyonyi Shallom Cooperative, an affiliate of Mt. Elgon Agro Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Enterprise (MEACCE), display their household vision plans following a Gender HouseholdApproach (GHA) training session. Through the visioning exercise, couples developed shared goals and practical action plans for their households, focusing on improved communication, joint decision-making, equitable sharing of roles and responsibilities, financial planning, and sustainable coffee production. The exercise encourages spouses to work together towards a common vision, strengthening household wellbeing while contributing to more productive and resilient coffee farming families"

RWENZORI SNOWS YOUTH COFFEE FARMERS' COOPERATIVE

"The Rwenzori Snows Youth Coffee Farmers' Cooperative team with the coach following a coaching session on integrating gender-responsive practices into business operations, farmer engagement systems and cooperative governance. Through the Gender Household Approach (GHA), the cooperative promoted joint household planning, equitable decision-making and improved labour and income management among coffee-producing households."



"As part of its commitment to creating an inclusive work environment, the cooperative also established a child-friendly space where women can safely leave their young children while attending training sessions, sorting coffee or delivering produce. This practical family friendly initiative has enabled more women to participate consistently in cooperative activities, improve their productivity and apply new skills. Subsequently the cooperative recorded encouraging progress, including increased coffee volumes, higher participation of women suppliers and strengthened organisational systems. While these outcomes cannot be attributed solely to the coaching intervention or the childcare initiative, they are consistent with the programme's objectives and demonstrate how gender-responsive and family friendly practices can contribute to stronger business performance and more inclusive coffee supply chains."



"A couple from Rwenzori Snows Youth Farmers' Cooperative engages in a discussion while developing their shared vision during the Visioning exercise in a Gender Household Approach (GHA) couple training session. The exercise encourages spouses to reflect on their aspirations, set common household goals and develop a joint vision and action plan. This fosters communication, shared decision-making and collaboration in managing their household and coffee enterprise."

"Juliet uses the cooperative's childcare space while participating in coffee sorting, training and produce delivery activities. With her children safely cared for nearby, she is able to focus on herwork, breastfeed when needed, and return to her tasks with confidence. The childcare service has increased her participation in cooperative activities, improved her productivity and strengthened her ability to contribute higher-quality coffee while balancing her family responsibilities."





"When we work together with our wives, our families become happier, our farms become more productive, and everyone benefits." Through the Gender Household Approach training, Kule transformed his perceptions of gender roles, strengthened his partnership with his wife, diversified their household livelihood, and now champions positive masculinity within his community.

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY WITH MARKUP II'S YOUTH AGRIBUSINESS ACCELERATOR

Across Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, the EU–EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme (MARKUP II) is working with local business support organisations to help young agripreneurs build stronger, more competitive and market-oriented businesses.

Young entrepreneurs across East Africa operate in very different contexts. Their businesses span different value chains, markets and operating environments, but many share a common ambition: to build sustainable enterprises that create income, jobs and opportunities in their communities.

This ambition reflects the theme of this year's International Youth Day, "Different Contexts, Common Aspirations."

Through the MARKUP II Youth Agribusiness Accelerator, MARKUP II is helping young entrepreneurs turn this ambition into stronger businesses, while working through local business support organisations (BSOs) that understand their respective markets and entrepreneurial ecosystems.

The four-month accelerator targets agripreneurs aged 18–35. In its first cohort, 90 youth-led enterprises were selected across Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

Participants receive a mix of online and in-person training covering areas such as productivity, value addition, business modelling and financial management. Alongside this, each cohort receives hands-on mentoring from local BSOs: Africa Harvest Biotech Foundation International (Africa Harvest) and Ashoka Africa in Kenya, Westerwelle Startup Haus Kigali in Rwanda, and Hive Colab in Uganda.

This partnership model allows MARKUP II to combine a common regional approach with support adapted to local realities, while strengthening the institutions that form part of the wider entrepreneurship ecosystem.

LOCAL PARTNERS AT THE CENTRE OF THE ACCELERATOR

In Rwanda, Westerwelle Startup Haus Kigali works with businesses across food processing, logistics and crop production. Its mentoring combines core business fundamentals with support tailored to individual enterprises and Rwanda's particular market-access realities.



"It's pushed us away from a one-size-fits-all model. A young entrepreneur in food processing faces a very different set of challenges than one working in livestock, logistics, or crop production," says Nadege Umutesi, Program Coordinator at Westerwelle Startup Haus Kigali

In Uganda, Hive Colab brings a technology and innovation lens to the accelerator. Young agripreneurs are encouraged to use digital tools for record keeping, financial management, marketing, customer engagement and market intelligence, while strengthening areas such as traceability, quality assurance and value addition.

"We encourage founders to see technology as a business enabler rather than an end in itself," says Bruno Bakahika, who provides programme and project support at Hive Colab.

In Kenya, Africa Harvest brings its experience in agriculture, food systems and enterprise development, helping young people identify opportunities beyond primary production in areas such as agro-processing, aggregation, logistics, services, marketing and value addition.

"Their contexts may differ, but they share a common aspiration to build resilient enterprises that transform their own lives and create opportunities for others," says Moses Kahumbu, Agribusiness Lead at Africa Harvest.

Ashoka Africa complements this with a changemaking and leadership perspective, supporting entrepreneurs to strengthen their business models, identify barriers to scale and develop the leadership and confidence required to grow their ventures.

"They are not just looking for an economic opportunity, they are using entrepreneurship as a vehicle to create change," says Ruth Soi of Ashoka Africa.

Together, the four organisations bring complementary expertise to the accelerator. Their involvement also demonstrates the value of working through institutions already embedded in local entrepreneurship ecosystems and strengthening their ability to provide practical, context-specific support to young businesses.



STRENGTHENING THE ECOSYSTEM AROUND YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

MARKUP II's approach recognises that young businesses need more than technical training. They need organisations that can mentor them, connect them to networks and markets, challenge their assumptions and help them navigate the realities of growing a business.
By working through established BSOs, MARKUP II is therefore investing in both young enterprises and the ecosystem around them.

The programme provides a common framework for enterprise development while enabling each organisation to adapt its support to the needs of its cohort. Through this collaborative approach, BSOs deepen their experience in mentoring youth-led enterprises, strengthen connections with entrepreneurs and market actors, and apply different models of business support to the realities of their national contexts.

This helps build stronger local support structures that can continue to serve young entrepreneurs beyond individual programme activities.

STRENGTHENING THE ECOSYSTEM AROUND YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS

Market exposure is another important part of the accelerator.

Participants have engaged in platforms including the Uganda International Trade Fair, the East Africa Coffee Market & Conference and the EAC MSME Trade Fair, providing opportunities to interact directly with customers, buyers, experts and potential partners.



For Hive Colab's Uganda cohort, participation in the Uganda International Trade Fair demonstrated that a good product alone is not enough. Entrepreneurs also need effective branding, packaging, consistent quality, a clear value proposition and confidence when engaging buyers. Five supported businesses showcased products across packaging, cocoa, coffee and avocado.
Africa Harvest has similarly seen market exposure help entrepreneurs better understand buyer expectations around quality, pricing, packaging and market positioning, while encouraging them to think beyond local markets towards regional and international opportunities.

For some participants, these opportunities are already producing tangible results. One accelerator participant secured an export agreement with a Germany-based buyer, while others have generated sales, contacts and new business opportunities through programme-supported events.

INNOVATION WITH IMPACT

The enterprises supported through the accelerator demonstrate the innovation young people are bringing to agriculture. Participants are developing solutions including beauty products made from coffee waste, fish leather and environmentally friendly packaging produced from agricultural waste.

Behind these different businesses is a common ambition: to build enterprises that are commercially viable while creating opportunities and solving problems within their communities.

This is also what makes the partnership between MARKUP II and its BSOs important. Different organisations bring different expertise; different countries present different challenges; and every entrepreneur has a different pathway to growth.

By bringing these actors together, MARKUP II is helping young entrepreneurs access the skills, mentorship, networks and markets they need to grow, while strengthening the local institutions that support them.

On International Youth Day, the Youth Agribusiness Accelerator demonstrates "Different Contexts, Common Aspirations" in practice: young East Africans pursuing different opportunities, supported by strong local organisations, and united by an ambition to build competitive businesses, create jobs and contribute to the region's economic future.

Partners:

Upcoming Events

- 05–09 October 2026 – 20th Meeting of the EAC Codex Forum, Kigali, Rwanda
- 06–08 October 2026 – Fruit Attraction, Madrid, Spain
- 06–08 October 2026 – Participation in Fruit Attraction Madrid, Madrid (participants from Tanzania and Rwanda)
- 06–09 October 2026 – 25th EAC Standards Management Committee Meeting, Nairobi, Kenya
- 12–16 October 2026 – Avocado Production and Post-Harvesting Practices Training – Cohort 2, Dereva, Rwanda
- 15–17 October 2026 – EAC Export Promotion Subcommittee Meeting and EAC TPO TWG Meeting, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- 19–23 October 2026 – Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods (CCF19), Cairo, Egypt
- 29 October – 05 November 2026 – Wanrich Coffee Exporters – Support for EU Coffee Buyer Tour, Kenya
- 30 October – 08 November 2026 – EAC Regional Quality Awards Ceremony, Kigali, Rwanda
- 30 October – 08 November 2026 – EAC MSME Trade Fair, Kigali, Rwanda
- 01–05 November 2026 – Rumani Coffee – Support for EU Coffee Buyer Tour, Kenya
- 04–06 November 2026 – EAC Regional Leather Platform Meeting, Kigali, Rwanda
- 08–10 November 2026 – HortiLogistica Africa 2025, Arusha (participants from Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi)
- 09–12 November 2026 – EAC Competitiveness Observatory – Regional Technical Meeting, Kigali, Rwanda
- 10–12 November 2026 – 30th WAIPA World Investment Conference, Geneva, Switzerland



A regional development initiative that promotes economic growth in the East African Community (EAC) through private sector development and export promotion.

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pcu@eacmarkup.org

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