



# More young people now creating jobs

By SHEILA MWIHIA

Kenya's burgeoning economy is creating new and untapped opportunities across many sectors. American President Barack Obama's recent visit to the East African country may have attracted the world's attention to the opportunities in the region. However, a dramatic transformation has long been taking place in what is one of the world's fastest growing economies. Local start-ups are becoming major players; international firms and investors are moving into the country's tech-hubs, setting Kenya on the way to becoming an economic powerhouse. With this new growth come new job opportunities and career paths.

This unprecedented rate of urbanisation continues to lure young job seekers away from semi-skilled and casual labour, into the cities and towns in search of work in the region's nascent formal sectors. Outside the region, more and more members of the global East African diaspora are ready to come back home and contribute to their homeland's development.

## Young entrepreneurs

It is a very encouraging sign that more and younger people are launching entrepreneurial ventures after graduating from college, nurtured by a slew of new start-up incubators and investments across multiple sectors, and supported by both local and foreign investment.

Although the exodus from East Africa and the "start-up" business phenomenon may both have initially been created by job scarcity, it is clear that the paradigm has now shifted. There are increasingly more opportunities for people who are driven by innovation and the desire to create jobs and pursue their passions, while soaring high and making an impact.

The emerging sectors and industries are seeking specialised and unique talent who will thrive on the rapidly changing business scene. These booming industries demand fresh ideas from young professionals to consolidate their market share. Among Kenya's emerging professions, the following industries stand out in particular:

## Information and communications technology

The thriving ICT and Telecommunications sector continues to expand as the Kenyan government positions the country as East Africa's ICT hub. ICT entrepreneurs are creating employment opportunities in electronic banking and other value added services across multiple electronic platforms. Kenya's rapidly growing mobile penetration rate continues to open up opportunities across many sectors.

## Financial services

The push for retail banking is creating a broad range of new positions at different levels, and investment banking is also picking up rapidly. We are seeing the launch of more private equity and fund management entities. The setup of these organisations requires skills and experience from more proficient markets, and this has been a strong factor in enticing East African expatriate talent back home.

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## Energy

Increased investment in the renewable energy and in oil and gas exploration sectors is fuelling job growth, including specialised roles such as project management. It is encouraging to note that talented women are showing interest in joining what was once considered an off-limits sector.

## Infrastructure

Increased expenditure on infrastructure has stimulated interest from local and foreign investors. Development partners often incorporate talent requirements into their project plans.

In recent years, the executive search industry has changed dramatically. We are shifting the focus away from finding very specialist industry talent and functional skills to finding future leaders, regardless of sector or industry. Companies are starting to realise that they must hire based on their future business aspirations as well as their current vacancies. This is certainly the case in Kenya, and to an increasing degree across the wider East Africa region. These vacancies will create a wide array of opportunities for individuals who will make a real difference in the future. ☛

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## Path to successful businesses

Anzisha Prize, Africa's award for entrepreneurs between the ages of 15-22 identified young entrepreneurs who are making it in Africa and they suggest the following tips for successful businesses.

### Take the first step

Africa is a continent facing many challenges and this can be a demotivating factor when it comes to starting out. Cameroonian, Nteff Alain who won the 2014 Anzisha prize, started GiftedMon, an e-content platform for pregnant women. He says it is important to stay focused on the goal and take the first step, as solutions to the challenges will start becoming clearer.

### Develop your entrepreneurial brand

Tom Osborn is the founder of GreenChar in Kenya, a clean energy start-up that produces charcoal briquettes for cooking purposes. Named as one of Forbes global 30 under 30 social entrepreneurs, he advises young entrepreneurs to develop their business and personal brand.

### Separating business and pleasure

South Africa Thato Kgathanye is one of the entrepreneurs behind Repurpose Schoolbags, a social initiative that recycles plastic shopping bags to make schoolbags with inbuilt solar technology. This enables underprivileged children to study after dark. Her co-founder, Rea Ngwane is also her childhood friend. The two have learnt to separate their personal relationship from their business.

### A good team is everything

Togolese Sam Kodo had by the age of seven built his first robot. Today, he is the founder of Infinite Loop, a company that locally produces low-cost personal computers for students. He believes the key ingredient for success is a good team. He reveals that he and his business partner have complimentary skills.

### Motivation must come from within, not from others

Winifred Selby, co-founder of Ghana Bamboo Bikes Initiative says entrepreneurial success is far from easy to achieve, and many youths will be discouraged by family and friends from giving up a stable salary to follow an entrepreneurial vision. Her company has received numerous global awards since its inception. She is of the opinion that while entrepreneurs should not be unrealistic or ignorant about the huge risks they face, they also have to be a bit brave. She adds that it is important for entrepreneurs to draw inspiration and courage from their own dreams and passions rather than simply relying on the support of others.

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