

Export competitiveness

EXPORTS

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In this interview Mr John Marie Kyewalabye, project coordinator of INVITE explains what has been achieved since the establishment of the project and what needs to be improved on.

What has been the biggest achievement of INVITE since its establishment?

The biggest achievement of the INVITE Project, particularly under the Export Firm Support (EFS) component, has been the successful rollout of a structured and transparent export development support system that is already delivering results.

To date, 116 Ugandan firms have signed grant agreements and are receiving targeted support to improve their export competitiveness.

The project has committed about Shs2.9 billion towards activities such as certification, product development, branding, and market access.

Equally important, INVITE has established key institutional systems, including an online application platform, a reimbursement-based funding mechanism, and a pool of export development consultants. These systems are laying the foundation for the long-term transformation of Uganda's export sector.

Challenges: 'Challenges remain, around application quality, limited availability of qualified consultants, and delays in implementation for some firms.'

116 Ugandan firms get export boost

How have the two calls for INVITE performed?

The first two calls for proposals have performed well, both in terms of uptake and in generating valuable lessons for improvement.

A total of 310 applications were received under the two calls, out of which 209 firms were eligible for support, and 116 firms were approved. This highlights the rigorous eligibility and quality requirements of the Project.

The Project has since introduced improvements such as a categorisation system for applicants, which has enhanced processing efficiency.

Beneficiary feedback has also been positive, with about 68 percent of supported firms expressing satisfaction with the intervention.

However, challenges remain, particularly around application quality, limited availability of qualified consultants, and delays in implementation for some firms.

How many companies have benefited from INVITE?

To date, 116 firms have directly benefited from the EFS Project through signed grant agreements. Out of these, over 110 firms are implementing export development activities, while 35 firms have already completed their planned interventions and submitted reimbursement claims.

In addition, a pipeline of potential exporters is being supported through preparatory Projects such as boot camps, bringing the total number of firms impacted—directly and indirectly—to over 150.

What is the current total portfolio of INVITE?

Under the Export Firm Support component, the Project has so far committed about Shs2.94 billion.

On average, each firm receives about Shs25 million in support, depending on the nature and scope of their export development activities.

At the broader level, the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) support component of INVITE is backed by a total funding envelope of approximately \$8.8 million, reflecting a significant investment in Uganda's industrial transformation and export growth.

How long is the INVITE Project going to stay?

The INVITE Project is a multi-year project aligned with Uganda's national development framework, particularly the Fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV) and is scheduled to close in FY2026/2027. The project is structured as a medium-term intervention aimed at delivering sustained improvements in export performance and job creation. Depending on its performance, there are prospects for scaling it up.

What kind of re-

Key takeaways

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forms are needed to drive INVITE forward?

Key priorities include strengthening the pool of qualified export development consultants to match growing demand, improving turnaround times in application processing and reimbursements, and enhancing outreach to ensure more firms—particularly outside the Central Business District—can access the project.

There is also a need to strengthen data systems, including building a reliable national database of exporters, and improving monitoring and reporting compliance among beneficiary firms.

Overall, the focus is on improving efficiency, scale, and inclusiveness of the project.

How is INVITE changing the companies benefiting from it?

INVITE is transforming beneficiary firms by addressing the core constraints that limit their ability to com-

pete in export markets. Through the project, firms are accessing international certifications, improving product quality and packaging, strengthening branding, and identifying new markets.

Many are also participating in international trade fairs and building direct relationships with buyers.

These interventions are enabling firms to move from informal or domestic focused operations into structured export businesses, with improved revenues, stronger market positioning, and greater resilience.

Additionally, the project is contributing to job creation and improved productivity within supported firms.

Who are the main funders of INVITE?

The INVITE Project is funded by the Government of Uganda with support from the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA). It is further supported through a Multi-Donor Trust Fund comprising contributions from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. Implementation is coordinated through the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU) in collaboration with relevant government institutions.

What criteria are applied for companies or individuals to qualify for funding?

The project targets formally registered Ugandan firms engaged in manufacturing, agro-processing, or high-value commodity exports.

To qualify, firms must have been in operation for at least one year, employ a minimum of two people, and demonstrate clear intent to enter or expand in export markets.

They must also comply with all legal, tax, and regulatory requirements. In addition, firms must present viable proposals that demonstrate how the support will enhance their export competitiveness, including activities such as certification, market development, and production upgrades.

Entities involved in prohibited sectors such as alcohol, tobacco, weapons, and gambling are not eligible.

What is the maximum amount a company can receive?

Under the Export Firm Support component, eligible firms can receive up to \$40,000 (Shs150m) each, covering up to 80 percent of the approved costs for export development activities.

The INVITE project represents a strategic intervention to reposition Uganda's private sector towards value addition, export competitiveness, and job creation.

The EFS intervention is demonstrating strong potential to transform Uganda's export landscape.

John Marie Kyewalabye addresses participants in Kampala. Through the INVITE project, firms are accessing international certifications, improving product quality and identifying new markets. PHOTO/MARTIN LUTHER OKETCH

