

Standards matter because they enable innovation and technology transfer, industrialisation and job creation, writes **Collins Wafula**.



Collins Wafula, International Coordinator at Uganda National Bureau of Standards.

Last month, the World Bank released its World Development Report 2025, *Standards for Development*. For the first time, the report

Standards for growth: Insights for Uganda

was dedicated to the role of International Standards to development.

The report argues that standards; rules that ensure quality, safety, and interoperability, are now central to economic development and proposes a three-step tiered framework that countries at any stage of development can deploy in their quest towards greater application of standards.

Countries may choose to tailor global standards to local realities (adapt), harmonise with international norms as institutions mature (align), and ultimately shape global standards in priority areas (author).

Standards matter because they enable innovation and technology transfer, industrialisation and job creation, and the seamless access to markets. In fact, over 90 percent of global trade is influenced by standards.

For Uganda, where industrialisation, export growth, and digitalisation are national priorities towards the tenfold growth target, strengthening standards and associated quality infrastructure is essential for unlocking produc-

tivity and global competitiveness.

A recent study by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) attributed 23.7 percent of Uganda's GDP growth and over 50 percent growth in productivity between 2001 and 2019, to standards.

To turn standards into springboards for development, policymakers will have to take deliberate steps. Firstly, government should resist the urge to overregulate and instead bolster application of standards as tools for both policymaking and regulation.

With an economy dominated by MSMEs, it is imperative to adopt progressive pathways that enterprises can

navigate towards greater compliance with regulatory requirements.

Secondly, we need to increase investment in quality infrastructure to support manufacturing and export growth and concurrently strengthen enforcement of compliance.

Public-private partnerships, digitalisation and facility sharing provide plausible mechanisms to expand access to a robust quality infrastructure. Trainings on quality aspects need to be integrated in key government initiatives like the Parish Development Model (PDM), Generating Growth Opportunities and Productivity for Women Enterprises (GROW) Project and Emyooga so that beneficiaries can produce goods that compete favorably in the market.

Lastly, active participation in international standardisation needs to be strategically expanded. Already, our participation in the policy and technical aspects of global standardisation is significant.

Uganda has just joined the 20-member board of ISO and is an active mem-

STANDARDS

To turn standards into springboards for development, policymakers will have to take deliberate steps. To start with, the government should resist the urge to overregulate and instead bolster application of standards as tools for both policymaking and regulation.

ber in over 120 technical committees. Besides, Uganda actively participates in other global bodies like International Electrotechnical Commission, African Standardisation Organisation, Codex Alimentarius Commission and the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries among others.

In a nutshell, standards are the baton in the race to prosperity. For Uganda, standards are not technical checkboxes, they are strategic tools for competitiveness, resilience, and inclusive growth. Policymakers and economic actors must master standards so as to shape the future of trade, technology, and public services.

In the words of famous German industrialist, Werner von Siemens, he who owns the standard, owns the market.

collins.wafula@unbs.go.ug

23.7%

The percentage of GDP growth in Uganda attributed to standards between 2001 and 2019.