

Seeds of Gold

KATIC: The innovation hub offering drone training for agriculture



Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC) at the University of Nairobi's College of Agriculture and Veterinary Services in Upper Kabete, during its official launch on August 14. EVANS HABILA/NATION

BY SAMMY WAWERU

Drones are becoming a game-changer in farming globally, with countries such as India, the Philippines, Ghana, South Africa, Poland, the United States and Zambia already reaping significant benefits from their use. The technology is enabling them to tackle food insecurity and bridge hunger gaps faster.

Kenya, through the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and In-

novation Centre (KATIC) recently unveiled by Elgon Kenya in partnership with the University of Nairobi (UoN), is now positioning itself to join the ranks of these nations.

The modern facility located at the UoN College of Agriculture and Veterinary Services in Upper Kabete, is now offering specialised training on the use of drones in agriculture. The short training programme is designed to help revolutionise Kenya's agricultural sector, which still relies

heavily on conventional farming methods.

By introducing drone technology, the research hub aims to promote precision agriculture, a modern approach that enhances efficiency, sustainability, and productivity.

Elgon Kenya Director, Dr Bimal Kantaria, says the launch of the hub is part of a broader vision to modernise agriculture in the country. He notes that offering training on the use of agricultural drones will empower farmers

to better manage pests, diseases, and other challenges affecting crop production.

"Primarily, drones have been used for surveillance in security. However, their application in agriculture is an interesting development that is set to revolutionise farming and make work easier for farmers," he says.

KATIC seeks to equip students pursuing agriculture and related courses, alongside farmers and agricultural experts, with hands-on, modern technical

skills.

The facility, funded by Elgon Kenya at a cost of Sh80 million, sits on a one-acre piece of land and features a demonstration farm to enable practical learning.

Dr Bimal reveals that teaching the use of drones in farms has already commenced. "It is a three-month course, and several students as well as farmers have already graduated with certificates," he says.

Drones, as essential tools in

modern agriculture, allow farmers to monitor crop health through aerial imaging. They detect pest or disease infestations at an early stage, and assess water stress using multispectral cameras. The device also supports farmland mapping, irrigation management, and the precise application of fertilisers and pesticides, to minimise wastage of inputs.

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First Lady Rachel Ruto cuts the ribbon to officially launch the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre at UoN College of Agriculture and Veterinary Services in Upper Kabete, Nairobi, on August 14. She is joined by Cabinet Secretary for Youth Affairs, Creative Economy and Sports Mr Salim Mvurya, and Mrs Sarla Kantaria, among other dignitaries. PHOTO | ELGON KENYA

First Lady officiates launch of innovation centre to empower youth in smart agriculture

Supported by Elgon Kenya, the innovation centre will be a place where ideas meet action, enabling young people to create solutions that promote sustainable farming

First Lady Rachel Ruto has encouraged young people to actively participate in smart agriculture, saying the surge in agricultural innovation offers the opportunity to increase production and ensure food security in the country.

Mrs Ruto made the remarks during the opening of the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC) at the University of Nairobi's Upper Kabete campus on August 14. She was the chief guest.

"The hub, anchored here at the university, will drive research and innovation. When these ideas are

taught at technical colleges, Ministry of Agriculture centres, and community platforms, they will reach farmers, schools, and local markets," she said.

Supported by Elgon Kenya, the innovation centre will be a place where ideas meet action, empowering young people to create solutions that promote sustainable agriculture.

The First Lady said President William Ruto believes that equipping farmers with the best tools, knowledge, and technology will not only secure good harvests, but also the nation's future.

The Government is committed

to fostering enabling policies and programmes that support policy, investment in infrastructure, and affordable credit to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship in agriculture.

Mrs Ruto said agriculture is a crucial sector that ensures adequate food, manufacturing and agro-processing.

The First lady said KATIC will open new pathways for increased production and productivity, entrepreneurship and shared prosperity.

"This hub will be a centre where knowledge meets the soil; where farmers test solutions; and where

youth and women are empowered to turn ideas into lucrative ventures," she said.

The centre will offer training, internships, and incubation programmes to students of agriculture. Mrs Ruto pointed out that her office will partner with the innovation centre to showcase novel, sustainable, and climate-smart kitchen gardening technologies.

"This will complement the Ma-Ma Kitchen Garden Programme, which I launched last May at the Koibatek Agricultural Training Centre in Baringo County," she noted.

When industry and academia come together, good things happen



BY JULIUS OGAMBA, CABINET SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION

It takes an individual – a pioneer – to initiate the process of transforming a way of doing things. We've seen that with the establishment of the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC), a facility with the potential to change our food security conversation.

Through its generosity, the Kantaria family has shown what can be achieved when visionary people dream of myriad possibilities. The family didn't shy from approaching the University of Nairobi to share its dream of a vibrant agricultural sector backed by robust research and innovation.

We're not mistaken when we express our belief that KATIC will incubate ideas that will help transform our agriculture value chains. All it will take is a commitment from the various partners and, voila! the rest will be history.

I am proud of the University of Nairobi for opening its doors to Elgon Kenya Ltd, and for being swift in expediting the partnership. Our institutions of higher learning, and any other institutions for that matter, should demonstrate this kind of agility.

When industry and academia come together, good things happen.

Our students will now get a front view of what happens in industry because enterprises will congregate at the hub that is KATIC, to innovate and share knowledge. These young men and women will enjoy the experience of doing practical work at KATIC. When they graduate, they will have acquired skills that employers demand.

The training trend globally is to impart competencies. That's why as a nation, we've embraced competence-based education (CBE). By observing and doing, our students can confidently say they possess specific competencies they can employ in the world of work.

I expect to hear of innovations by faculty, students and other researchers emerging from KATIC.

The University of Nairobi has the human resource to ably support the work that will be going on at KATIC. Even then, we expect other partners to come on board and make KATIC flourish.

I understand that the centre is open to all individuals and entities keen to nurture innovation and the widespread use of technology in agriculture. Thus, the human resource pool will expand, providing mentoring and guidance to our students. Under such circumstances, we can only envision success for KATIC, and the entire nation.

I call upon youths from all learning institutions to make good use of this wonderful resource. The Sh80 million that the Kantaria family invested in KATIC should bear fruit for many years to come. We will then appreciate the true value of this massive philanthropic gesture.

KATIC: The innovation hub offering drone training for farmers to make informed choices and improve yields

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And by providing real-time data, drones promote precision farming – helping farmers make informed decisions, improve yields, cut costs, and adopt more sustainable practices.

"It is much easier to farm with drones since they are sophisticated and can serve over 100 acres within a short period. For instance, they can be used in spraying chemicals and fertilisers, surveying, and mapping areas that lack sufficient nutrients. This is an ad-

vanced technology that requires no fuel," explains Dr Bimal, who also chairs the Agriculture Sector Network (AS-NET) in Kenya.

Elgon Kenya, an agri-inputs supplier across East Africa, views the introduction of drone technology training in a learning institution as a milestone in nurturing the new generation of farmers.

The official launch of KATIC on August 14 was presided over by First Lady of Kenya Rachel Ruto, who applauded the partnership between Elgon Kenya

and UoN in driving research and innovation to reimagine Kenya's food systems.

"We will not keep innovations behind walls, but will put them in the hands of farmers," Mrs Ruto emphasised.

The First Lady has been running several agricultural initiatives, including establishing kitchen and household gardens in schools across 21 counties in arid and semi-arid areas. Many of these projects apply modern technologies to improve food security.

The Principal Secretary (PS) for Agriculture, Dr Kipronoh Ronoh, highlighted the importance of modernising Kenya's agricultural sector. He noted that drones will play a critical role in combating pests, diseases, and other challenges that limit productivity.

"The launch of KATIC reflects the growing need to take innovation directly to farmers," said the PS.

Already, several large-scale farmers and agribusiness companies in Kenya have adopted drone technology in their operations. However, operating

drones, whether for private or commercial purposes, requires compliance with regulations set by the Kenya Civil Aviation Authority (KCAA).

Under the Civil Aviation (Unmanned Aircraft Systems) Regulations 2020, all operators must undergo a structured certification process. In addition, users are required to obtain a license from the KCAA before they can legally operate drones in the country.

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Why we've built KATIC

BY DR BIMAL KANTARIA
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
ELGON KENYA

People may wonder: What is the reason for us spending Sh80 million in the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC)? This centre is the latest in a string of public initiatives by our family. My father, Dr Rajnikant Nanalal Kantaria, whom we have named the facility after, was a great philanthropist and did a lot of projects in this country.

Also, it was one of the tenets of our great grandfather that whatever money you earn in your country, you must donate a bit of it back to the nation. KATIC is our contribution as a family to the country, our country, which has been our home since 1898.

So, this is our legacy for our father. My brother Baiju and my sister Leena, all thought this would be a great way of remembering him and the great work he did for our nation. He contributed a lot to the economy. He built businesses and supported many community projects (which are highlighted elsewhere in this newspaper in the tribute to his life).

At Elgon Kenya Ltd, we've employed 800 people. Our families – including my uncles and aunts – have in total employed several thousands.

So, the question, again, is: Why this centre? Apart from doing so in memory of our late father, we realised as Elgon Kenya that whilst university students were extremely bright, the challenge for them was to become street

smart.

At KATIC, which brings the private sector into academia, we'll show them the latest in agriculture. So, when looking for jobs, they'll be well informed about what is on the ground.

Secondly, many students are business-minded, but they lack the skills to go out and market themselves. So, the second goal of establishing KATIC is to make entrepreneurs out of youths. They may have brilliant ideas and want to start own businesses and become employers. We're here to support them realise that dream. We'll help them to get seed capital. So, when they have a good idea, they can come to KATIC and we'll help them set up their businesses.

We've already roped in some partners. For example, Astral Aviation has agreed to partner with KATIC to set up the very first drone school at this centre.

A company called Sproot from Switzerland has shown interest in training students in artificial intelligence (AI). We'll also partner with Bayer East Africa, and Syngenta, among others. We've got all these big companies ready to partner with us. We invite any company to join us. If you do anything that touches agriculture, come partner with us.

We're already excited about our collaboration with the University of Nairobi. We thank the university's leadership for moving quickly to partner with us. Together, we'll empower young people to contribute more to Kenya's agricultural sector.



The Kantaria family welcoming the First Lady Mama Rachel Ruto during the unveiling of the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre on August 14. PHOTO | ELGON KENYA

KATIC ushers in new era for Kenya's agriculture sector

BY CATHERINE RIUNGU

Kenya's agricultural landscape has turned a bold new page with the official inauguration of the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC) at the University of Nairobi's College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, Upper Kabete campus.

Unveiled on August 14, 2025 by First Lady Rachel Ruto, KATIC is more than a state-of-the-art facility. It is a national milestone, a beacon of innovation and a launchpad for a generation of agripreneurs ready to revolutionise the sector.

The ceremony attracted over 1,000 dignitaries, including Cabinet Secretaries, diplomats, schol-

ars, students, and private sector leaders, and was broadcast live on NTV and KBC, underscoring its national significance.

"This centre will empower youth, encourage innovation, and position agriculture as an exciting and viable career option for future generations," said Mama Rachel Ruto, applauding the unique public-private partnership between Elgon Kenya Ltd and the University of Nairobi.

Mama Rachael, the patron of MaMa Doing Good that has set up a demo site at KATIC, emphasised the importance of the centre for benchmarking by the movement that is training women countrywide on establishing kitchen gardens for nutrition and income generation.

KATIC is a heartfelt tribute by Elgon Kenya Ltd to its late founder, Dr Rajnikant N. Kantaria, a visionary whose life was marked by commitment to progress and philanthropy.

The facility was constructed at a cost of Sh80 million, entirely funded by Elgon Kenya, with an additional Sh20 million invested in equipping its world-class facilities.

Speaking at the launch, the Managing Director of Elgon Kenya, Dr Bimal Kantaria, said: "This is our gift to a country we have called home since our forefathers arrived in 1898. It is in honour of my father, a man who believed deeply in empowering others."

The Rajinkant Kantaria fam-

ily, represented across generations – Bimal, Baiju, Leena, and their children – stood united in a show of commitment to Kenya's agricultural future.

The larger Kantaria family among them Rasin Kantaria are solidly behind the ground-breaking KATIC as it encapsulates a Kantaria legacy.

Their vision was visibly affirmed by diplomats from India, Israel, France, China, and Switzerland, who expressed keen interest in supporting KATIC's development.

Catherine Riungu is the Secretary of Agriculture Media Society Catherine@agrimedia.co.ke



Establishment of centre is a brilliant idea: Here is why

BY DR ESTHER MWORIA
PRINCIPAL SECRETARY FOR
TVET

In the fullness of time, people will realise the brilliance and significance of establishing the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC).

I say this as a trainer. This centre has given us the unique opportunity to jointly train students with industry. It's an ideal situation for the learners, because they will receive practical training as per the needs of industry. By the time they graduate, they will be well and fully trained. They will be well-grounded in the industry in which they must move to after graduating.

In this case, we are not talking about university students alone. We have technical and vocational education and training (TVET) learners too.

TVET involves hands-on learning, such as what will be available at KATIC. This is whether we are referring to students who study agriculture, or even entrepreneurship, among others.

Because players in the agricultural value chain have been invited to KATIC, there'll be plenty for TVET students to learn there, including the art and science of innovation.

We should also remember that Kenya's agricultural sector will be better off when fed with the ideas coming from KATIC. Great minds will use this facility to inno-

vate and develop solutions to agricultural challenges.

While walking around KATIC during the official launch, I saw some innovations by University of Nairobi students. These young people are adding value to millet and a variety of fruits. That's encouraging.

I am sure hordes of young innovators from across the country will troop to KATIC to try out their ideas, and even commercialise them later on.

KATIC presents a major milestone in training for the agriculture sector. The ecosystem being developed at the centre will allow us to link training pragmatically with every sub-sector. This centre will be important for us to link training with every sub-sector, whether it is floriculture,

horticulture, or any other.

We are determined as Government to train students with an end in mind. We need to work very closely with the private sector, one of which is this one, so that we are able to understand to what end are we training our young people. It is no longer the business of this Government to just train students to graduate.

I want to reaffirm the State Department of TVET's commitment and recommitment to supporting this institution through policy, partnership, resources, and absolute training of our young people.

My appreciation to Elgon Kenya Ltd and the Kantaria family for funding KATIC. We cannot thank them enough for what they have done. But I am sure they will be delighted with how we'll use this centre to improve food security and train young people as pragmatically as is possible.

Seeds of Gold

The real value of KATIC-UoN partnership



BY PROF CHACHA NYAIGOTTI-CHACHA
CHAIRMAN OF UON COUNCIL

As the University of Nairobi (UoN), we are deeply honoured to host the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC). We are grateful to Elgon Kenya Ltd and the Kantaria family for choosing to work with the university on such an important investment.

Signing the agreement to establish the centre was a watershed moment for all of us. Then followed the official launch last week. But, as partners, we know that the hard part begins. Our work is to get KATIC rolling, set clear targets, and deliver on specifics. We must be clear about what our partners, students, faculty, researchers, farmers, industry, and other Kenyans expect from KATIC.

We aim to build a stimulating innovation environment where exciting ideas can be panel-beaten and ultimately commercialised. With the expected output from the centre, we have to institute and enforce a strong intellectu-

al property framework that rightly rewards innovators. This will give companies confidence that the ideas they'd want to commercialise are well protected by law.

KATIC gives us the opportunity to strengthen our institutional capacity for strategic collaboration with industry. It encourages more organisations to partner with us. We are looking at partnering with financial institutions, insurance firms, marketers and tech companies, among others that support the agricultural value chains.

Our researchers will have access to more resources, and can diversify their research areas to address challenges within the larger agricultural sector.

University-industry collaboration is a global phenomenon. It has been successfully practised elsewhere to great effect, more so in the advanced economies. We can benchmark against the standards set by such collaborations. On many aspects of operating the centre, we don't have to re-invent the wheel whereas we can adopt systems that have worked for others.

We see KATIC delivering great value to students. Those who are keen to contribute to providing solutions that address agricultural challenges have the opportunity to learn from industry. Here, they will be mentored and coached to become innovators.

My challenge to students across Kenya – not just those at the University of Nairobi – is for them to grab the chance of working with industry at KATIC. I am sure that's an experience they will treasure because of the skills they will acquire from the centre.

The future is exciting for our young people and the farming community. The challenge is for KATIC stakeholders to deliver it.

Why we are proud to host this agricultural innovation facility

From an agricultural education perspective, KATIC is a game-changer

BY PROF MARGARET HUTCHINSON
AG VICE-CHANCELLOR,
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

The Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC) that we've recently launched is not just an edifice, but the home of endless possibilities.

This is the kind of gift that gives and gives, and we thank the Kantaria family for this thoughtful gesture.

Agriculture concerns everyone in Kenya and beyond. Arming it with such a centre will thus positively impact many within and outside Kenya's borders.

At this centre, generations of Kenya's young people will learn, innovate, and commercialise their brilliant ideas. At this centre, our farmers, too, will directly quench their thirst for farming knowledge. From this facility, they will receive solutions that tackle the challenges they encounter – whether it's pests, weeds or inclement weather.

Changing weather patterns that swing from one extreme to the next pose major threats to our agriculture. We are experiencing that. Leveraging technology and innovation, KATIC is expected to significantly expand our climate-smart options as a country.

We harbour no doubts that we have



University of Nairobi Ag Vice-Chancellor Prof Margaret Jesang' Hutchinson. FRANCIS NDERITU INATION

to make agriculture sustainable so that it continues to contribute to food security, livelihoods, industrialisation, and the entire economy. After all, agriculture is the backbone of our economy. That's where KATIC comes in handy.

From an agricultural education perspective, KATIC is a game-changer.

Universities have often been accused of failure to adequately involve industry in the training of students. KATIC changes that. Here, all students undertaking agriculture at the University of Nairobi (UoN) and other institutions of higher learning will regularly

rub shoulders with industry players, including captains. They mustn't wait until attachment because industry has come to their doorstep.

Our nation stands to reap the benefits of involving, empowering and inspiring our youth. At this centre, young people will get the opportunity to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations regarding agriculture. Their ideas will not be dismissed as wishful dreams, but will be fairly exposed to the rigours of research and allowed to ferment into useful products and services.

We want to dispel this myth that only faculty can engage in serious research. Now students have an equal opportunity and resources to try out their ideas. It would be amazing – but not unprecedented – to see undergraduates innovating and taking their products to market. It can be done. It should be done. Indeed, that should be the norm at KATIC.

Elgon Kenya Ltd and UoN alone cannot nurture this beautiful flower. It will take the commitment of other members of society, including entities from across the globe, to make KATIC truly flourish and unlock the potential it carries. Let's all work together to transform agriculture, agricultural education, and the economy through this single grain of wheat.



Mr Bimal Kantaria, Mr Rasik Kantaria and Mr Baiju Kantaria shake hands with First Lady Mama Rachel Ruto during the official launch of KATIC.



The Kantaria family and Elgon Kenya Staff.



Mrs Hiral Kantaria with First Lady Mama Rachel Ruto during the official launch of KATIC.



Leena Kantaria with First Lady Mama Rachel Ruto during the official launch of KATIC.



The Kantaria family with First Lady Rachel Ruto, Cabinet Secretary for Youth, Creative Economy and Sports Mr Salim Mvurya, and TVET Principal Secretary Esther Mworira, during the official launch of Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre. PHOTOS | ELGON KENYA

Tribute

Dr Rajnikant Kantaria: A legacy of social service, leadership and vision

Rajni’s life’s journey reminds us that greatness is not measured by personal success, but by the number of lives one touches along the way

Dr Rajnikant Nanalal Kantaria, fondly known as Rajni, was born on December 6, 1942 in Nairobi. From an early age, he was guided by strong values of hard work, community service and faith.

After completing his education in Business Studies, he joined the family enterprise, the Kantaria Group of Companies, where his commitment and vision soon made him an integral part of the company’s growth and success. In 1966, he married Sarla and they were later blessed with three children – two sons and a daughter – and eight grandchildren.

Beyond his business achievements, Dr Rajni Kantaria distinguished himself as a philanthropist, community leader and social reformer.

He was the founding member of Elgon Kenya Ltd, which is to date a leading regional supplier of agricultural inputs, with over 500 employees.

His contributions to strengthening Kenya’s agricultural sector extended beyond commerce, reflecting his belief that empowering farmers was key to food security and national progress. This vision is most clearly embodied in the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC), which continues to serve as a hub of modern farming research, training and sustainability, standing as a testament to his enduring legacy.

Dr Rajni Kantaria’s life was defined by service. Over several decades, he held leadership positions in numerous respected institutions. He was elected Chairman of the Lohana Mahajan Mandal for three years, during which he introduced medical schemes, emergency assistance programmes during droughts and floods, and other initiatives for the less fortunate.

Similarly, he served as Chairman of the Desai Memorial Foundation where he championed education, spearheading projects such as paying school fees for 100 needy children and establishing libraries in schools at no cost. He remained a lifelong trustee of these organisations, guiding their committees with wisdom and humility.

Dr Rajni Kantaria’s leadership extended nationally when he served as Chairman and trustee of the Hindu Council of Kenya from 1994, for three years. Under his stewardship, the Council carried out numerous charitable projects that brought direct benefits to Kenyans, including acquisition of City High School. Also, he was the founding member and Chairman of the Asian Foundation, which played a key role in establishing the City Park Hawkers Market.

As a true community builder, Dr Rajni Kantaria was actively involved in the Giant Group of Nairobi, where he became both Chairman and later Federation Chairman covering Kenya and Tan-

zania. The organisation became widely known for its charitable work and assistance to the needy, under his leadership. A recognised and respected example was his commitment to the Nairobi Giant Hearing Centre.

With his family’s support, he also established Nyanjega Primary School in Limuru, which today educates over 800 students; and the Kantaria Church Hall, a community space used for religious and cultural gatherings in Kiambu County. In addition, the family has supported the schooling and upkeep of quite a number of children in Limuru area.

His efforts were formally recognised in December 2004 during Jamhuri Day celebrations, when he was honoured by the President of Kenya with the prestigious Head of State Commendation (HSC) for his untiring contributions to social service.

Dr Rajni Kantaria’s lifelong commitment to religion can be seen in the Shree Vallabhdham Haveli temple in Parklands. His presence and support, coupled with his generous donation and ability to fundraise, were all instrumental in shaping the vision and growth of the temple. This support subsequently filtered into Shreenath Dham London, Bhakti Dham Bopal and Shreenath Dham Perth.

He was equally dedicated to healthcare, and was an active board member and donor of the Jaipur Foot programme for several decades. His transformative work with the Jalaram Satsang Mandal (JSS) began in 1998 when he became a trustee. Together with fellow leaders, they oversaw the establishment of a permanent temple and the launch of several charitable projects, including a street children feeding programme serving up to 2,000 children daily, the drilling of a borehole to supply free water to underprivileged communities, donations and wheelchair initiatives, and the establishment of a modest medical clinic.

Recognising the immense need for affordable healthcare, Dr Rajni Kantaria and his fellow trustees embarked on an ambitious project – the creation of a world-class Jalaram Medical Centre alongside the new temple. It was an undertaking of enormous scale, requiring immense dedication and fundraising. Nearly Sh1.8 billion was raised through private donations, mainly from the Asian community in Kenya. Completed in 2021, the facility now provides comprehensive diagnostic services, has a Doctor’s Plaza, and offers subsidised treatment for underprivileged families. It has since become a cornerstone of accessible healthcare in Nairobi, fulfilling his vision of compassion-driven service.

In recognition of his lifelong humanitarian work, Dr Rajni Kantaria was



The late Dr Rajnikant Nanalal Kantaria, PHOTO | ELGON KENYA

LEADERSHIP

Dr Rajnikant Nanalal Kantaria, fondly known as Rajni, was born on December 6, 1942 in Nairobi. Beyond his business achievements, Dr Rajni Kantaria distinguished himself as a philanthropist, community leader and social reformer.

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awarded a Doctorate of Philosophy in Humanities in July 2010 by the United Graduate College and Seminary, USA, honouring him with the distinguished title of Doctor of Philosophy. Beyond this honour, he dedicated much of his life to serving on numerous boards and committees, including the Limuru Girls Centre, Jacaranda School of the Men-

tally Handicapped, Kenya Union for the Blind, and the Gandhi Memorial Academy. He also served as a trustee of Jalaram Satsang Mandal, Jalaram Medical Services, Pushtimargiya Vaishnav Sangh-Nairobi, and many more.

To those who knew him, Dr Rajni Kantaria was a man of vision, humility, and generosity. Whether speaking to business leaders or sitting among farmers and schoolchildren, he carried himself with warmth and sincerity. His tireless service across education, healthcare, religion and agriculture reflected a singular belief; that true leadership lies in uplifting others.

Today, his name lives on not only through the institutions he built, but also in the lives of the countless men, women and children he helped. From schools and libraries to hospitals and temples, his contributions remain woven into the fabric of Kenyan society.

The Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC), in particular, stands as a permanent reminder of his passion for progress and his commitment to creating a better future for all. His enduring legacy continues to inspire, reminding us that greatness is not measured by personal success, but by the number of lives one touches along the way.

Seeds of Gold

Capacity building

Seed that Elgon Kenya sowed on the fertile Upper Kabete grounds sprouts with promise

Built on the backbone of collaboration, KATIC is envisioned as Kenya's version of globally recognised innovation clusters like Israel's MASHAV and the Netherlands' Golden Triangle

BY CATHERINE RIUNGU

The establishment of the Kenya Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC) began with a ground-breaking ceremony on July 25, 2023, led by Prime Cabinet Secretary Musalia Mudavadi and Elgon Kenya Managing Director Dr Bimal Kantaria, and hosted by the University of Nairobi. The ceremony was witnessed by the then Indian High Commissioner Namgya Khampa.

In the 18 months that followed, the facility rose from the fertile grounds of Upper Kabete into a 27-acre hub of innovation with a clear strategic purpose: To serve as a bridge between academia, industry, and farming communities, and while at it, tackle practical challenges around soil health, crop protection, animal health, and postharvest management among others within the agriculture realm.

KATIC's five-pillar approach

Built on the backbone of collaboration, KATIC is envisioned as Kenya's version of globally recognised innovation clusters like Israel's MASHAV and the Netherlands' Golden Triangle. It aims to become a special economic zone (SEZ) dedicated to agribusiness innovation, offering a platform where research is translated into real-world solutions; students gain practical experience; farmers are exposed to climate-smart technologies; and industry partners co-create sustainable agricultural models.

At the core of KATIC's model is a five-pillar approach: Showcasing technology and research; com-

mercialising innovations; capacity-building and outreach; academia-industry collaboration; and climate-smart agriculture promotion.

These aren't just theoretical ideals. They are working frameworks. Through work-study programmes, internships and innovation labs, students and young professionals are directly engaged with real-time agricultural challenges.

One such programme – the Elgon Kenya-University of Nairobi Graduate Internship – has already placed dozens of students into practical roles, giving them access to mentorship, fieldwork, and exposure to the full value chain. These internships serve as critical touchpoints for skills development, innovation, and career growth in agriculture.

"This is how we make agriculture attractive to youth by showing them that it's not just a science but a business and a way of life," said Dr Bimal Kantaria.

Elgon's model 4K-Club farm

KATIC's impact goes beyond university walls. It is tied intrinsically to Elgon Kenya's long-standing support of youth engagement in agriculture.

For nearly 40 years, the company has supported Nyanjega Primary and Junior School in Limuru, providing porridge, infrastructure, and an on-site agricultural model farm.

This year, Elgon Kenya launched a model 4K-Club farm at the school, complete with vertical gardens, orchards and drip irrigation. The success of this farm attests to a national roll-out of 4K-Clubs, with over 1,200 schools engaged today.

"The future of agriculture is the youth," emphasised Dr Bimal during the launch of the 4K-Clubs Revitalisation Programme, echoing KATIC's long-term commitment to nurturing agricultural leadership from a young age.

To further inspire the youth, Elgon Kenya and the Ministry of Agriculture introduced a 4K-Club category in the National Farmers Awards, offering trophies, cash prizes, and educational trips to top-performing school clubs. It is for this reason that a 4K-Club has been set up at KATIC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, as a showcase of replicating such farms in as many schools as possible to support agricultural education and nutrition, and generate income for participating schools.

A convergence of legacy, innovation, and action

KATIC also aligns with Kenya's



Part of the Kantaria family during the official opening of the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre on August 14. PHOTO | ELGON KENYA



broader vision of public-private partnerships and sector-wide innovation, spearheaded by the Agriculture Sector Network (ASNET), where Dr Bimal Kantaria serves as chairman. ASNET is the umbrella body for actors in Kenya's agriculture sector.

At the 4th National Agriculture Summit in 2024, KATIC was described as a "living lab" that transforms research into enterprise. The momentum continues with initiatives like the University Deans of Agriculture Forum, supported by ASNET and UPLIFT-Ag project, to harmonise curricula and policy engage-

ment across institutions. UPLIFT-Ag stands for Universities Promoting Linkages for Impactful Training, Innovation and Technology Transfer in Agriculture.

"Universities must lead innovation, not follow it," said Prof Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha, Chair of the UoN Council, at the launch of KATIC on August 14. "KATIC offers the infrastructure, partnerships, and vision to make that possible."

From primary school gardens to global policy tables, KATIC represents a convergence of legacy, innovation, and action. It is a space where young minds are shaped, technolo-

gies tested, and partnerships forged for a stronger, smarter agricultural sector in Kenya.

As the Centre opens its doors to students, farmers, researchers, and entrepreneurs, it does more than showcase Kenya's potential. It activates it. In doing so, KATIC honours the memory of Dr Rajnikant N. Kantaria with impact: Lives touched, careers launched, harvests improved. The seeds for these have been planted and they are sprouting.

Catherine Riungu is the Secretary of Agriculture Media Society
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University of Nairobi
Upper Kabete campus on August 14.
EVANS HABIL I
NATION

Universities must lead innovation, not follow it. KATIC offers the infrastructure, partnerships, and vision to make that possible

Prof Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha, Chair of the UoN Council



Seeds of Gold

BY SAMMY WAWERU

As many farmers across the country grapple with the upsurge in cases of soil acidity, Elgon Kenya has stepped in by producing fertiliser designed to address this gap. The agri-inputs supplier is now customising the farm input based on the actual status of the soil.

In an interview, the company's Managing Director, Dr Bimal Kantaria, said Elgon Kenya had established a factory capable of blending about nine different types of nutrients into fertiliser.

"We are making a range of customised fertilisers specifically for crops such as tea, coffee, sugarcane, maize, and wheat," Dr Bimal stated.

The deteriorating status of soil health in the country is largely attributed to the prolonged use of farm inputs with excess chemicals, which has significantly reduced the productivity of farms.

According to soil researchers, the problem cuts across the entire country, particularly in agricultural-producing regions.

The Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation (KALRO) had previously expressed concern that for a while, soil health had been neglected, even in the wake of the devastating effects of climate change. However, the state-owned research organisation has embarked on mapping and sampling soils across the country to address soil health.

Expressing Elgon Kenya's commitment to help farmers deal with soil acidity on their farms, Dr Kantaria explained that the new factory can produce large volumes.

"The production capacity is about 200 tonnes during the day shift, and at night, we produce similar volumes, translating to over 400 tonnes in a single day," he revealed.

He added that the blended fertiliser factory was equipped with advanced machinery imported from the Netherlands.

Elgon Kenya has invested over one million euros in the new facility, according to Dr Kantaria, who also chairs the Agriculture Sector Network (ASNET) – the umbrella body that represents the col-



Farming material from Elgon Kenya on display during the unveiling of the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC) at University of Nairobi Upper Kabete campus on August 14. PHOTO | ELGON KENYA

Unique solution

Elgon Kenya's customised fertilisers solve specific needs for crop and soil

The agri-inputs supplier has a factory capable of blending nine different types of nutrients into fertiliser meant to maintain soil health and boost productivity

lective voice of the agriculture sector in Kenya.

In early 2023, the Government unveiled a subsidised fertiliser programme aimed at cushioning Kenyan farmers, with Elgon Kenya being among the agro-processing companies tasked with manufacturing the farm input.

"For the Government subsidy fertiliser initiative, we are blending six types

of materials, including micronutrients such as Zinc and Boron, among others, which soils and crops require," Bimal explained.

He added that the state-funded fertiliser is also blended with gypsum and lime to help neutralise acidity in the soil.

The subsidised fertiliser is distributed to farmers through the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB) depots,

along with other approved farm input suppliers across the country. A 50kg bag is being offered to farmers at Sh2,500.

"We are committed to bringing new technologies and innovations into the agricultural sector to provide lasting solutions," Dr Bimal emphasised.

Increased soil acidity remains a major challenge for farmers in Kenya, a problem that directly affects agricultural



Dr Bimal Kantaria, Elgon Kenya Managing Director.

production and undermines the Government's efforts to tackle food security and hunger.

In an interview earlier this year, the KALRO Director General, Dr Eliud Kireger, explained that the ongoing soil mapping initiative would help boost farm productivity.

"The issue of soil health has been neglected for a very long time, but currently, KALRO is mapping soils across the entire country," Dr Kireger revealed.

Although he did not disclose the budget, he stated that the exercise is funded by the World Bank and is being conducted across all 47 counties.

"We are going to collect approximately 77,000 soil samples countrywide," Dr Kireger added.

Previously, experts had been issuing blanket recommendations to farmers due to insufficient knowledge about the actual health status of soils.

The KALRO Director General noted that the new approach would leverage a soil management information system. With the digitised system, he said, the organisation would "be able to determine the exact type of fertiliser farmers should use and the most suitable crops for specific regions".

This approach is expected to significantly boost food production in the country, even as the Government strengthens initiatives to address food security and hunger.

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From Bayer E.A to farmers: Superior solutions to modern-day agricultural challenges

BY NICHOLAS MILELU

Bayer E.A Ltd was honoured to participate in the August 14 official launch of the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC) that is sponsored by Elgon Kenya Limited.

Elgon Kenya and Bayer E.A are key partners, and this event was just one among many collaborations that we do together to bring our innovations to growers.

In line with its mission – 'Health for all and hunger for none' – Bayer brings its cutting edge technologies to help solve the challenge of food security, which is a leading concern for many governments.

Climate change and rapid

population growth have put much pressure on traditional farming methods, and there is dire need to produce more with less.

The future of farming in the continent will shift quickly to the younger generations that are more technologically savvy, hence the need to incorporate agricultural innovations in the curricula of schools and higher education institutions.

Among Bayer E.A's innovations are superior hybrid seeds and quality crop protection solutions. Among them are special maize hybrid seeds named DK8031, DKC80-33, DK777 and DK7500.

The first two – DK8031 and DKC80-33 are drought tolerant and mature early, yielding an average of 35 bags per acre.

DK777, on the other hand, is the block buster variety because of its adaptability to diverse geographical zones and its unique tolerance to the Maize Lethal Necrosis Disease (MLND). Its average yield is 44 bags per acre.

DK 7500 is the new kid in the block – a solution for dairy and poultry farmers. This is a yellow maize variety ideal for silage production because of its high leaf to stalk ratio. Additionally, it has been produced to provide high protein content, which is a major component for silage and chicken feed production. Its yield potential for silage is 35 tons per acre.

The high protein content translates to faster growth and higher weight for livestock. This eventually leads to more milk,



Bayer E.A Distribution Relationship Manager Nicholas Milelu explains the company's products at their exhibition tent during the launch of Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre on August 14. PHOTO | BAYER E.A

more eggs and more meat, and converts the farmer's enterprise into a profitable venture.

Nicholas Milelu is the Distribution Relationship Manager at Bayer E.A

Seeds of Gold

Elgon Kenya out to empower the next generation of farmers

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Participation in agriculture, whether as farmers, entrepreneurs or researchers and innovators, will help Kenya to unlock youth and the economy's potential. As Kenya Vision 2030 states, "Countries like Kenya, which have a relatively youthful population, stand on the runway of economic take-off if they find the correct formula to harness the energy, creativity and entrepreneurship that young people have to offer."

Kenya is considered youthful because a majority of its population, about 75 percent, falls below the age of 35. It can reap the dividends of this youth bulge when young people's boundless energy are channelled to productive activities that enable them to fully participate in national development.

As the 2014 Malabo Declaration by African leaders stipulated, Kenya needs to create job opportunities for at least 30 percent of youth in the agricultural value chains. Additionally, the country should facilitate preferential entry and participation for women and youth in gainful and attractive agribusiness opportunities.

It's noteworthy that in September, the world will celebrate 30 years of a global drive "to increase the quality and quantity of opportunities available to young people for full, effective and constructive participation in society."

This is according to the United Nation's World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), which observes that, "the imagina-



tion, ideals and energies of young people are vital for the continuing development of the societies in which they live."

Through the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC), Elgon Kenya Ltd is set to nourish the dreams of the country's young people.

Elgon Kenya is a one-stop shop for agricultural inputs ranging from fertilisers, crop chemicals, seeds, irrigation systems, greenhouse technology, animal health products, and farm packaging. It is also the authorised distributor for top multinationals whose products are widely used in agriculture.

The firm has also invested heavily in the training of distributors and stockists, ensur-

ing that agrovetts and retailers across the country are well-versed in product usage, agronomy, pest and disease management, and environmental safety.

Elgon Kenya also sponsors and organises on-farm demonstrations, farmer field days, and agronomy clinics that provide direct, hands-on guidance.

The result is a well-informed agricultural value chain that allows farmers to get the best out of every input – reducing crop failure, boosting yields, and improving profitability.

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Elgon Kenya Technical Sales Manager, Irrigation, Mr Premal R. Battle (second from left) oversees explanation of an irrigation concept during the launch of KATIC on August 14. PHOTO | ELGON KENYA

About the National MaMa Kitchen Garden Programme

BY ARNOLD KIPCHUMBA

The National MaMa Kitchen Garden Programme, launched on May 14, 2025 by First Lady Mama Rachel Ruto, is a transformative initiative designed to strengthen food and nutrition security across Kenya. It is jointly implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development and MaMa Doing Good organisation, in collaboration with county governments and a wide network of partners.

The programme promotes kitchen gardens in households and schools, creating spaces where families and learners can grow vegetables, fruits, and herbs for daily use. These gardens ensure access to fresh, affordable, and nutritious food while improving dietary diversity, especially for children and vulnerable communities. By incorporating innovations such as water harvesting, small-scale irrigation, and modern preservation techniques, the initiative also builds resilience to the impacts of climate change.

MaMa Doing Good has partnered with Elgon Kenya and established a National Mama Kitchen Garden Model Farm at the Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre (KATIC). This demonstration site showcases a range of climate-smart and innovative kitchen gardening technologies and solutions, serving as a hub of learning and inspiration for

households, schools, and institutions across the country. This partnership further exemplifies how private sector-industry-government collaboration can effectively drive the goals of the programme.

Beyond nutrition, the Mama Kitchen Garden Programme empowers women and youth with skills, tools, and opportunities to turn kitchen gardening into an income-generating activity. Schools are also using the gardens as practical classrooms that enrich the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), giving learners hands-on lessons in agriculture, nutrition, and climate action.

As a multi-sector programme, it brings together government institutions, county governments, research bodies, civil society, and the private sector to deliver impact at scale. Anchored in the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA) and Vision 2030, and closely linked with the National Programme for Accelerated Forestry and Rangelands Restoration (15 Billion Tree-Planting Programme) to support its strong focus on agroforestry and fruit trees, it stands as a model of how partnerships, innovation, and community action can secure Kenya's food and nutrition future.

Arnold Kipchumba is the Director of Environment and Climate Action at MaMa Doing Good



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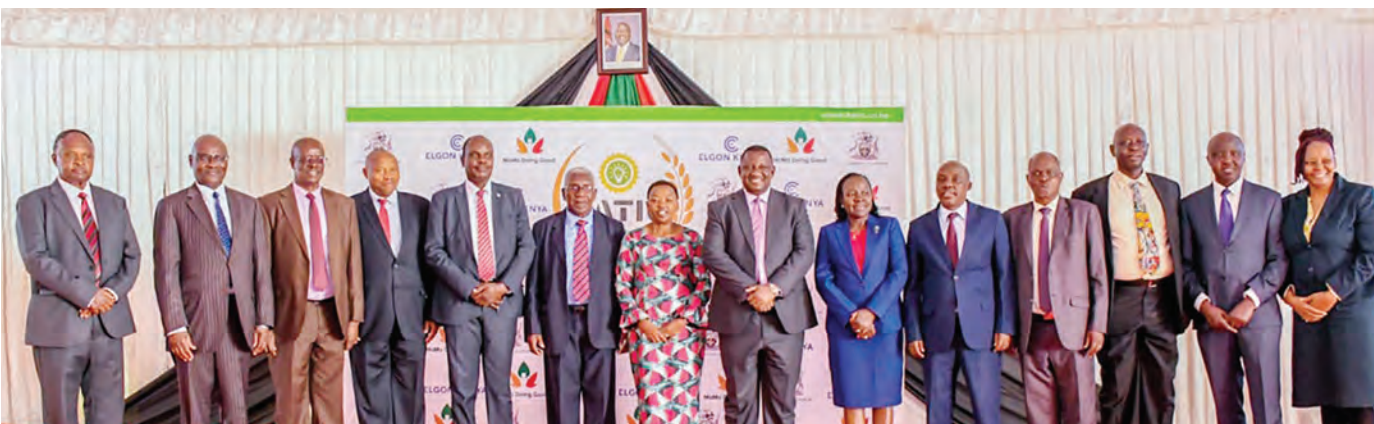
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University of Nairobi management and lecturers flank First Lady Rachel Ruto, Cabinet Secretary for Youth, Creative Economy and Sports Mr Salim Mvurya, and TVET Principal Secretary Esther Mworira, during the official launch of Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre. PHOTO | ELGON KENYA



Elgon Kenya Staff during the official launch of Kantaria Agricultural Technology and Innovation Centre. PHOTO | ELGON KENYA