

Building the Brand: Marketing Strategies for Attracting Startups and Investors to Entrepreneurship Hubs in Developing countries. A Case Study of Iringa Municipal.

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Abstract: *This study addresses a critical gap in entrepreneurial ecosystem development: the absence of tailored marketing frameworks for entrepreneurship hubs in secondary cities of developing countries. While such hubs are vital for inclusive economic growth, they struggle to attract startups and investors due to visibility deficits, credibility challenges, and resource constraints. Focusing on Iringa Municipality, Tanzania, this research employs a mixed-methods approach integrating stakeholder surveys, institutional interviews, and contextual analysis to investigate how strategic marketing and branding can reposition regional hubs beyond traditional support functions. The findings reveal that successful attraction hinges on three synergistic strategies: deep cultural embedding (integrating local heritage and trusted community figures into brand identity), digital-physical hybridization (blending online platforms with place-based rituals), and policy aligned positioning (leveraging national development frameworks to signal legitimacy to investors). Crucially, the study demonstrates that marketing is not merely promotional but foundational to ecosystem credibility, transforming hubs from passive incubators into curated gateways for investment and innovation. Theoretically, this work redefines place branding for resource constrained contexts, showing how peripheral hubs can turn geographic and cultural specificity into competitive advantages. Practically, it provides a replicable model for secondary cities across the Global South: by authentically narrating local potential while strategically connecting to broader capital and policy networks, hubs can overcome peripheral marginalization. This research eventually argues that effective marketing is central to decolonizing entrepreneurial development, enabling regions like Iringa to architect their own economic futures rather than conforming to metropolitan templates.*

Keywords; Place Branding, Entrepreneurship Hubs, Developing Economies, Cultural Embeddedness, Investor Attraction, Secondary Cities, Ecosystem Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship hubs are vital engines for economic growth in developing countries, yet attracting startups and investors remains challenging. This research examined how strategic marketing and branding position such hubs effectively, focusing on underserved regions. Using Iringa Municipality, Tanzania, as a critical case study, the paper investigates the specific marketing strategies required to build a compelling hub identity, foster stakeholder engagement, and enhance visibility locally and globally. The findings aimed to provide actionable insights for hub managers and policymakers seeking to unlock entrepreneurial potential and investment in similar developing contexts.

Entrepreneurial ecosystems and innovation hubs play a crucial role in fostering startup growth, economic development, and sustainable entrepreneurship [1, 2]. These ecosystems provide essential resources such as funding, mentorship, networks, and support structures that enable startups to innovate and expand [1, 2]. Innovation hubs and incubators are particularly important in emerging economies, serving as catalysts for sustainable business models that balance environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic viability [2]. However, challenges such as funding

insecurity, brain drain, and policy constraints can hinder the potential of these ecosystems [1]. The effectiveness of innovation hubs depends on addressing these challenges and fostering cooperation among stakeholders [1]. Overall, entrepreneurial ecosystems and innovation hubs are critical drivers of economic dynamism, job creation, and technological advancement in the 21st-century global economy [1, 2].

Innovation hubs and incubators play a crucial role in fostering sustainable entrepreneurship and economic growth by providing resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities to startups [3]. These ecosystems are particularly important in emerging economies, where they can catalyse innovation and address local sustainability challenges [3]. Entrepreneurship has been identified as a key driver of sustainable development, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [4]. However, the effectiveness of these hubs depends on addressing challenges such as funding insecurity and policy constraints [5]. To maximize their impact, entrepreneurial ecosystems should focus on cultivating opportunities, developing competencies, and implementing sustainable business models [4]. Policymakers and entrepreneurs are encouraged to collaborate in building successful ecosystems that can stimulate economies and contribute to solving global challenges [6].

Africa's entrepreneurial landscape is experiencing significant growth, driven by a young population, increasing urbanization, and digital adoption [7]. However, entrepreneurs face persistent challenges such as limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and complex regulations [8]. Despite these hurdles, digital entrepreneurship is thriving, with tech hubs emerging in major cities [8]. Government policies play a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurship, with African nations implementing various initiatives to promote startup ecosystems and streamline regulations [9]. The USA's experience offers valuable lessons for African countries, emphasizing the importance of supportive policies, tax incentives, and funding mechanisms [9]. While digital technologies have empowered local entrepreneurs, they must adapt to local markets and infrastructure challenges rather than pursuing global dominance [8]. Addressing infrastructural gaps remains critical for boosting productivity and achieving inclusive development across the continent [10].

The African Union's vision for a single African market through the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) aims to enhance entrepreneurial potential [11]. To address these challenges and capitalize on opportunities, there is a growing emphasis on institutionalized business incubation as a means to accelerate entrepreneurship in African countries [12]. This approach is seen as crucial for creating a superior entrepreneurial ecosystem, promoting economic growth, and fostering innovation and creativity across the continent [12].

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in Tanzania's economic development, but face numerous challenges. These include difficulties in accessing finance, inadequate infrastructure, and complex regulatory environments [13, 14]. The Tanzanian government has implemented policies to support SME growth, such as the National Entrepreneurship Development Policy, though gaps remain between policy intentions and SME experiences on the ground [15] [14]. Entrepreneurship training has been identified as a key factor in enhancing SME sustainability, with specific areas like customer service, opportunity identification, and record keeping proving particularly beneficial [16]. However, the high cost of such training remains a significant barrier for many entrepreneurs [16]. To address these challenges, government interventions are needed to improve access to finance, simplify regulatory processes, enhance infrastructure, and make entrepreneurship training more accessible and affordable [13] [16].

The startup ecosystem in Tanzania, particularly in Dar es Salaam, has been growing with the emergence of technology business incubation initiatives [17]. Digital technologies have played a transformative role in empowering entrepreneurs, especially women, in sectors like e-commerce, fintech, and agritech [18]. Business support services provided by incubators, such as the University of Dar es Salaam ICT

Innovation Hub, have positively influenced digital entrepreneurs' performance through business development assistance, marketing support, mentoring, and funding [19]. However, challenges persist, including the gender digital divide and limited access to capital ([18]. Business incubation in Dar es Salaam faces constraints and risks becoming an exclusive organization, potentially cementing existing societal roles [20]. To address these issues, it is crucial to tailor incubation programs to local needs and focus on digital literacy programs and gender-inclusive policies to unlock the full potential of entrepreneurs in Tanzania [18, 20].

Research in Iringa, Tanzania, reveals a complex entrepreneurial landscape with both challenges and opportunities. Vocational education students show interest in starting businesses, driven by a desire for autonomy, with entrepreneurial family backgrounds positively influencing intentions [21]. The region's ICT innovation ecosystem offers potential for poverty alleviation, though technical and economic limitations hinder rural communities' ability to capitalize on new technologies [22]. Women entrepreneurs in food processing face obstacles such as limited market access and capital, but employ strategies like forming economic groups to mitigate these challenges [23]. Recent exploration of NFTs in digital marketing reveals moderate awareness and significant interest across industries, offering opportunities for revenue generation and enhanced ownership. However, challenges related to scalability, volatility, and regulation persist, necessitating focused efforts on education and infrastructure development to fully leverage their potential [24].

Startups in regional hubs face challenges including isolation from networks, limited access to specialized mentorship, and difficulties in building visibility beyond the local context [22]. These issues can make such regions appear higher risk to investors due to perceived market limitations and lack of investment-ready opportunities [25]. Addressing these challenges requires more than physical infrastructure; it necessitates a strategic approach to building the region's brand as a credible destination for entrepreneurship and investment [26]. This involves developing intangible factors such as access to novel ideas, role models, and region-specific opportunities [26]. Additionally, creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem requires institutional arrangements, public resource endowments, and private sector functions to commercialize innovations [27]. Successful entrepreneurship is thus a collective achievement, involving key roles from entrepreneurs in both public and private sectors to construct and evolve the industrial infrastructure [27].

The global discourse shows the importance of hubs; the African context highlights their critical role in driving inclusive development; Tanzania's national policies actively promote entrepreneurship; and Iringa possesses inherent potential. The critical question, therefore, revolves around the mechanisms through which a regional hub like Iringa can

effectively position itself within the competitive landscape to attract the essential ingredients for a thriving ecosystem: talented entrepreneurs and the capital to fuel their growth. This positioning is intrinsically linked to marketing and strategic communication. It involves crafting a compelling narrative about the hub's unique value proposition, its success stories, and the opportunities it presents.

It requires targeted outreach to specific stakeholder groups, startups looking for the right environment and investors seeking promising ventures and conducive environments. It necessitates building credibility and trust, both locally and externally. While the need for strong infrastructure, sound policies, and quality services is foundational, without effective marketing strategies to amplify visibility, demonstrate impact, and attract key players, even well-resourced hubs can struggle to reach their full potential [28]. This is especially true in developing countries where resources are constrained, competition for attention is fierce, and perceptions about regional viability need active management. Thus, understanding and implementing effective marketing strategies becomes not merely an auxiliary function, but a core strategic imperative for entrepreneurship hubs in secondary cities across the developing world, seeking to unlock their local potential and contribute meaningfully to broader economic transformation.

While entrepreneurship hubs are recognized globally and increasingly in Africa and Tanzania, research critically neglects how hubs in secondary cities of developing countries can effectively market themselves to attract startups and investors. Existing literature focuses on major hubs' success factors or general challenges, overlooking the specific integrated marketing and branding strategies needed to overcome the unique visibility, credibility, and resource constraints faced by hubs like Iringa. No study provides a tailored framework for strategically positioning such regional hubs in developing contexts to build their brand and ecosystem appeal.

Focusing on Iringa Municipality, Tanzania, the research pursues three interconnected objectives: First, to systematically identify and critically analyses the current marketing and branding practices employed by the hub to attract startups and investors. This involves mapping channels, messaging, and resource allocation, evaluating their effectiveness, strategic alignment with the hub's mission, and responsiveness to the specific constraints and opportunities of regional context specifically in developing economies of the word. opportunities. Second, to comprehensively assess the perceptions, expectations, and decision-making drivers of key stakeholders. This entails investigating the views of both local/regional startups seeking support and potential local/international investors regarding the hub's brand identity, communicated value proposition, and overall credibility as a conducive environment for entrepreneurial growth and investment in the respective regional.

Third, to synthesize findings into actionable recommendations by developing a context-specific framework of integrated marketing and branding strategies.

This study holds significant practical, theoretical, and policy value. Practically, it provides Iringa's hub managers and similar regional hubs in developing countries with an actionable marketing framework to enhance visibility, attract startups/investors, and unlock local economic potential, directly addressing resource constraints. Theoretically, it advances knowledge on place branding and entrepreneurial ecosystem development in underserved secondary cities, filling a critical gap in literature focused on major metropolises. Policy wise, it offers evidence-based insights for Tanzanian and African policymakers to design targeted support mechanisms for decentralizing entrepreneurial growth beyond capital cities, fostering inclusive economic development and achieving national/continental industrialization goals like FYDP III and Agenda 2063.

The remaining part of this paper is arranged as follows: Methodology of the study is in section 2, section 3 contains results and discussion of the study, while conclusion and recommendations are presented in section 4 followed by acknowledgement in section 5.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory mixed-methods design. A quantitative approach using surveys will provide generalizable data on stakeholder perceptions and practices, while qualitative methods (interviews) will offer deeper insights into experiences, motivations, and contextual issues. This triangulation ensures a strong understanding of the marketing dynamics within hub ecosystem.

2.2 Study Area

The research focuses exclusively on Iringa Municipality, Tanzania. Specific sites include the entrepreneurship hub(s) within the municipality, co-working spaces, relevant government offices (e.g., Municipal Council, SIDO branch), and locations frequented by local startups and investors.

2.3 Population of the Study

The target population comprises four key stakeholder groups essential to the hub's ecosystem. Startups: Entrepreneurs and founders of early-stage and growth-stage ventures based in or seeking support from the Iringa hub. Investors: impact investors, and representatives of investment firms active or potentially interested in the Iringa region. Hub Management/Staff: Personnel responsible for the

hub's operations, programs, and marketing activities. Supporting Institutions: Representatives from local government (Municipal Council), relevant agencies (e.g., SIDO), and partner organizations involved in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

2.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total sample size of 216 respondents was targeted, distributed using stratified purposive sampling to ensure representation of key groups and access to knowledgeable informants, Startups: 126 respondents (Stratified by sector, stage, hub engagement level). Sampling: Purposive targeting of active hub users/applicants and random selection from broader local startup lists. Investors: 45 respondents (Impact, Local/International). Sampling: Purposive targeting based on known activity/interest in Tanzania/region and snowballing. Hub Management/Staff: 30 respondents (All key personnel, including marketing/communication staff). Sampling: Census of relevant staff. Supporting Institutions: 15 respondents (Municipal officials, SIDO, key NGOs). Sampling: Purposive selection of decision-makers involved in entrepreneurship support.

2.5 Data Collection Tools

Structured Questionnaires: Administered online and physically to Startups (126) and Investors (45). These captured demographics, perceptions of hub marketing/branding, information sources, decision factors, and rating scales on effectiveness. Piloted beforehand. Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with Hub Management/Staff (30) and Supporting Institutions (15). Interview guides explored current marketing strategies, challenges, resource allocation, collaboration efforts, and perceived stakeholder needs. Audio-recorded with consent. Document Review: Analyses hub marketing materials (website, social media, brochures), relevant municipal policies, and hub reports.

2.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative Data from surveys analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) summarized profiles and perceptions. Qualitative Data (Interviews & Open-ended survey questions), were transcribed and analyzed using Thematic Analysis. Coding identified recurring themes, patterns, and insights regarding marketing practices, challenges, stakeholder expectations, and proposed strategies. Findings integrated with quantitative results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the results and discussion of the findings are presented in the form of current hub marketing practices,

stakeholders' perceptions, proposed strategy impact and policy alignment.

3.1 Explanatory Analysis of Current Hub Marketing Practices

The assessment of the Iringa entrepreneurship hub's marketing capabilities revealed systemic challenges across three dimensions. Regarding channel utilization, the hub's outreach efforts were fragmented. In table 1 results shows that only 35% of staff reported consistent daily social media activity, primarily limited to Facebook announcements rather than strategic engagement. Event hosting averaged four major activities annually predominantly local workshops rather than investor-facing initiatives. Critically, structured investor outreach campaigns occurred quarterly among just 20% of personnel. One program officer noted,

"We invited investors only when startups were 'ready' – which rarely happened,"

highlighting reactive rather than sustained relationship-building.

In terms of messaging clarity, foundational branding elements were underdeveloped. Documentation of a Unique Value Proposition (UVP) existed among only 40% of staff in table 1, resulting in inconsistent communication. Marketing materials often emphasized generic support for entrepreneurs rather than Iringa's distinct agribusiness or youth innovation advantages. Success story publication averaged merely two case studies per year, despite 68% of surveyed startups reporting positive outcomes. A communications staffer admitted,

"We collected testimonials but lacked resources to refine them into marketable assets,"

indicating missed opportunities to build credibility through proven impact narratives.

Resource constraints fundamentally shaped these limitations. The marketing budget averaged 12% of operational expenditure – disproportionately allocated to physical events (55%) rather than digital or investor outreach. Human capital proved equally constrained: with just 1.5 full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff dedicated to marketing functions, responsibilities were dispersed across untrained personnel. Administrative staff managed social media between other duties, while investor engagement fell to senior managers already overloaded with operational tasks. This dilution of expertise manifested in uncoordinated efforts; as one manager stated,

"Everyone marketed, but no one owned the strategy."

Table 1: Current Marketing Practices (Objective 1)

Key Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Data (n=30 Hub Staff)
Channel Utilization	Social Media Activity	35% report daily posts
	Events Hosted (Annual)	Avg. 4 major events
	Investor Outreach Campaigns	20% conduct quarterly campaigns
Messaging Clarity	Unique Value Proposition	40% have documented UVP
	Success Stories Published	Avg. 2 case studies/year
Resource Allocation	Marketing Budget (% of total)	Avg. 12%
	Dedicated Marketing Staff	1.5 FTE (Full-Time Equivalent)

The confluence of these factors sporadic channel usage, ambiguous messaging, and skeletal resourcing reflected a reactive approach to marketing. Efforts prioritized immediate community visibility over strategic brand-building for investor attraction. While the hub successfully engaged local entrepreneurs through workshops, its inability to systematically articulate competitive advantages or demonstrate success to capital providers limited regional impact. The data show that enhancing Iringa's hub appeal would require not merely tactical adjustments but a fundamental reallocation of resources toward audience specific value proposition development and sustained stakeholder nurturing.

3.2 Analysis of Stakeholder Perceptions: Startups vs. Investors

The study revealed pronounced disparities in awareness and perceived value of the Iringa hub between startups and investors. Regarding awareness in table 2, startups demonstrated moderate familiarity, with 68% having heard of hub services. However, only 32% could recall specific programs unprompted, indicating superficial engagement. Investor awareness was critically low: just 42% acknowledged familiarity with the hub, and a mere 18% identified any concrete initiative. This visibility gap was particularly acute among international investors; one Dar es Salaam-based venture capitalist noted,

"Iringa wasn't on our radar, we assumed all pipeline came through Dar or Arusha,"

highlighting the hub's struggle to penetrate broader investment networks.

Perceived value metrics further showed divergent viewpoints. Startups rated the hub's relevance to their business stage at 3.6/5, reflecting adequate alignment with early-stage needs. Mentorship quality scored higher (3.9/5), suggesting core support services resonated locally. Conversely, investors assigned markedly lower scores: 2.8/5 for relevance (indicating doubt about deal flow quality) and 3.1/5 for mentorship (viewed as insufficient for scaling ventures). This disconnect stemmed from differing expectations; while startups valued accessible training, investors sought market-ready ventures with growth traction – a misalignment the hub failed to bridge.

Credibility barriers emerged as the most critical impediment. In table 2 results depicts that, although 28% of startups acknowledged the hub's lack of track record, this concern spiked to 67% among investors. More damagingly, 51% of startups and 82% of investors agreed the hub had "weak investor connections." This perception became self-reinforcing; limited exits or funding successes hindered proof-of-concept, deterring investor engagement. A Tanzanian angel investor explained,

"We need proof points – startups scaling to regional markets or raising Series A. Without those, hubs remain classrooms, not launchpads."

Table 2: Stakeholder Perceptions (Objective 2)

Key Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Startups (n=126)	Investors (n=45)
Awareness of Hub	Heard of Hub Services	68%	42%
	Can Recall Specific Program	32%	18%
	Relevance to Business Stage (1-5 scale)	Avg. 3.6	Avg. 2.8*

Perceived Value	Quality of Mentorship (1-5 scale)	Avg. 3.9	Avg. 3.1
Credibility Barriers	"Lack Track Record" (Agree/Strongly)	28%	67%
	"Weak Investor Connections" (Agree)	51%	82%

Three contextual factors aggravated these gaps:

- **Geographic Isolation:** Investors limited physical presence in Iringa restricted firsthand experience.
- **Communication Asymmetry:** Hub messaging emphasized training (valued by startups) over investible pipelines (demanded by investors).
- **Success Story Scarcity:** With only two annual case studies published, the hub couldn't counteract its "unproven" reputation.

Consequently, while the hub achieved moderate grassroots legitimacy among local entrepreneurs, it failed to establish institutional credibility with capital providers. This credibility deficit manifested in low investor attendance at events (<20% of deal forums included external investors) and constrained startup growth aspirations, only 15% of startups using hub services had secured external funding. The data confirmed that without strategic interventions to enhance visibility, demonstrate measurable outcomes, and curate investor-grade opportunities, the hub risked continuing a cycle of unrealized potential.

3.3 Analysis of Proposed Marketing Strategies and Projected Outcomes

The strategic framework developed for the Iringa hub prioritized three core initiatives to address identified gaps in visibility, credibility, and stakeholder engagement. The Digital Brand Hub initiative aimed to transform the hub's online presence from a static information portal into a dynamic storytelling platform. In table 3 results shows that, at baseline, the website attracted only 350 unique monthly visitors, with investor-focused pages achieving a 12% engagement rate. The strategy centered on publishing

localized success stories – particularly agribusiness ventures leveraging Iringa's strengths – and creating an investor deal room. Projections estimated these enhancements would increase traffic to 2,000 monthly visitors and boost investor engagement to 35% within 24 months. One tech officer noted,

"Our old site buried what investors needed; the redesign made opportunities discoverable,"

Quarterly Themed Pitch Events targeted the hub's critical investor connectivity deficit. Historically, ad-hoc pitch sessions averaged just eight investors per event, yielding only two funded startups annually. The new model focused on sector-specific themes (Agritech, Green Energy) aligned with regional advantages and investor appetites. By coordinating with Dar es Salaam-based investor networks and pre-vetting startups, projected attendance rose to 25 investors per event. The strategy's emphasis on post-event follow-up – including standardized investor updates – aimed to increase annual funded startups to ten. This represented a 400% improvement, transforming events from networking exercises into measurable capital pipelines.

The Local Ambassador Program addressed trust-building through hyper-local engagement. With only five community partners initially, the hub struggled with grassroots credibility beyond its immediate network. The program recruited respected alumni, successful entrepreneurs, and cultural influencers (e.g., cooperative leaders, elders) as ambassadors. Their role involved organizing micro-events, mentoring, and advocating for the hub across Iringa's districts. Projections showed partner expansion to 22 entities would amplify reach, driving a 40% increase in regional startup applications (from 15%). As one coffee cooperative leader reflected,

"Farmers trust messengers who know our soil,"

highlighting the value of culturally embedded advocacy.

Table 3: Proposed Strategy Impact (Objective 3)

Strategy	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Current	Proje
Digital Brand Hub	Unique Website Visitors/Month	350	2,000
(Portal w/ success stories)	Investor Page Engagement Rate	12%	35%
Quarterly Pitch Events	Avg. Investors Attended/Event	8	25
(Themed: Agritech, Green)	Startups Funded Post-Event (Annual)	2	10
Local Ambassador Program	Community Network Partners	5	22
(Engaging alumni/mentors)	Regional Startup Applications Increase	15%	40%

Cross-Strategy Synergies were critical for scalability:

- Digital hub success stories fed ambassador talking points
- Pitch event alumni became ambassador candidates
- Local applicant growth (40%) expanded the investible pipeline

While resource intensive, requiring reallocating 18% of the budget to marketing, the integrated approach demonstrated how repositioning Iringa as a specialized investment destination (rather than a generic support centre) could overcome peripheral disadvantages. The 24-month projections collectively targeted a fundamental shift: from being perceived as a well-intentioned incubator to becoming a proven gateway for regional opportunity.

3.4 Analysis of Policy Alignment for Hub Marketing Support

The identification of required support mechanisms revealed strong convergence between stakeholder needs and existing policy frameworks. Table 4 shows a dedicated marketing grants emerged as the highest priority (4.6/5), reflecting acute awareness of the hub's resource constraints. This demand aligned directly with Tanzania's Five-Year Development Plan III (FYDP III), which prioritized SME development through "enhanced market access and visibility initiatives." Stakeholders emphasized that targeted grants would enable sustained brand-building activities impossible under the hub's 12% marketing budget. As a municipal officer noted,

"FYDP III's SME growth targets require hubs to attract capital – that demands professional outreach we can't self-fund."

Investor tax incentives ranked second in priority (4.2/5), particularly among investor respondents. Their advocacy dovetailed with the National Investment Act (2022), designed to stimulate capital deployment in high-potential regions. Stakeholders proposed tiered incentives: reduced capital gains tax for investments held 3+ years in Iringa based startups, and deductible travel costs for investors attending hub events. This policy lever directly addressed the investor credibility gap, with 82% previously citing weak connections as a barrier.

Hub-university R&D links received moderate but strategic support (3.8/5), table 3. Alignment existed with the Iringa Municipal Education Strategy's goal to commercialize academic research. Proposed interventions included embedding entrepreneurship courses featuring hub case studies, and joint Agritech prototyping labs with Tumaini University. While deemed longer-term, stakeholders recognized this would enhance the hub's value proposition by creating investible spin-offs addressing investor concerns about pipeline quality (2.8/5 relevance score).

Two critical insights emerged from this alignment analysis:

- High-Priority Feasibility: Marketing grants and tax incentives leveraged *existing* national policies (FYDP III, Investment Act), enabling rapid implementation without new legislation.
- Place-Based Leverage: All mechanisms capitalized on Iringa's unique assets – agricultural dominance for investor incentives, academic institutions for R&D links – moving beyond generic support.

Table 4: Policy Alignment

Support Needed	Alignment with Policy	Stakeholder Priority (1-5)
Dedicated Marketing Grants	Tanzania FYDP III (SME Development)	4.6
Investor Tax Incentives	National Investment Act 2022	4.2
Hub-University R&D Links	Iringa Municipal Education Strategy	3.8

Consequently, stakeholders viewed policy alignment not as theoretical compliance but as a pragmatic pathway to operationalize the hub's marketing strategy. The 4.6-priority grants would fund the Digital Brand Hub; tax incentives under the Investment Act would boost investor attendance at pitch events; university partnerships would supply ambassadorial talent and success stories. This tripartite approach transformed policy frameworks from abstract documents into

actionable enablers for repositioning Iringa's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study established that entrepreneurship hubs in secondary cities of developing countries face distinct challenges in attracting startups and investors, rooted in visibility gaps, credibility deficits, and resource constraints. Using Iringa Municipality, Tanzania, as a case study, the

research demonstrated that traditional hub models effective in major metros fail to address the unique barriers faced by regional ecosystems. Success hinges on strategically repositioning these hubs beyond basic support services toward curated investment gateways that leverage local cultural, economic, and policy assets. The findings affirm that without intentional branding and stakeholder-specific marketing, even well-intentioned hubs will struggle to unlock their communities' entrepreneurial potential. Ultimately, this study redefines marketing not as peripheral outreach but as a core function for ecosystem building in underserved regions.

The study recommends the following;

- Weave local heritage traditions) into all communications to build grassroots trust.
- Train Ambassador Elders to co-host events and validate the hub's mission.
- Develop a Digital Deal Room featuring vetted startups, success metrics, and investor testimonial videos.
- Forge R&D partnerships with universities to co-create Agri-tech prototypes—transform academic work into investible startups.
- Apply for FYDP III marketing grants to fund success-story documentaries showcasing local founders.
- Earmark FYDP III funds for regional hub branding grants requiring matched private-sector contributions.
- Mandate university innovation hubs to partner with regional entrepreneurship centers
- Simplify visa processes for investors attending hub events in secondary cities.
- Sponsor Success Story Fellows to document startup journeys in Swahili and English for multi-channel distribution.

In the future the research can be carried on;

- Investigate how sustained integration of indigenous knowledge affects investor confidence and startup scalability.
- Analyse behavioral barriers influencing capital allocation to peripheral hubs, testing interventions like immersive blockchain verified success metrics.
- Map coordination failures between national incentives and municipal execution capabilities through institutional ethnography.
- Create adaptation frameworks transferring Iringa's place-based strategies to comparable Agro-ecological zones.

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