REPUBLIC OF KENYA

Kenya National Innovation Agency

CEIL SUMMIT 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

Executive Summary

The Commercialisation and Entrepreneurial Institutional Leaders (CEIL) Summit, organized by the Kenya National Innovation Agency (KeNIA), is an annual event that brings together institutional leaders, innovators, researchers, and industry stakeholders. The summit's goal is to advance Kenya's national commercialisation ecosystem by strengthening commercialisation processes and practices at national, institutional, and individual levels. It serves as a platform to showcase practical solutions that are addressing job and wealth creation. The 2025 Summit under the theme **Catalyzing our African Innovation and Entrepreneurial Ecosystems** sought to strengthen the role of universities, TVET and research institutions as launchpads for innovation-led economic growth and job creation and emphasized the importance of robust innovation ecosystems in driving sustainable economic development through effective industry-academia linkages, strategic frameworks, and resilient funding mechanisms

Preceding the summit were four pre-events that laid a strong foundation for the discussions: the Network of Entrepreneurial Institutions Leaders (NEIL) Council Meeting, Technology Transfer Office Module 2 Training, the Entrepreneurial Leaders Training Program (ELTP) Vice Chancellors Training, and the Institutions Working Group Cohort 3 Training. These engagements built momentum toward the main CEIL Summit by identifying and filling knowledge gaps, institutional challenges, and practical solutions around venture creation, technology transfer, and ecosystem linkages.

Over two days of rich, solution-oriented dialogue, the CEIL Summit 2025 challenged institutional leaders to rethink their core mandates, embrace entrepreneurship, and position universities as regional champions for innovation and industrialization. In the opening keynote address by Dr. Kenneth Karanja, PhD, a Technology Licensing Officer, at the University of Minnesota (USA) he called for an urgent shift from siloed institutional practices towards collaborative ecosystems that bridge academia, government, and industry. He emphasized that universities must move beyond training graduates to producing innovators, entrepreneurs, and market-ready solutions.

Key discussions during the summit revolved around research commercialization, venture-based curriculum models, sustainable funding pathways, and strengthening academia-industry partnerships. The summit highlighted that innovation must be embedded in institutional culture, supported by dedicated structures such as technology transfer offices, student-led innovation clubs, commercialization, and IP support. The summit further

underscored the need to reform university curricula to emphasize practical learning, mentorship by industry experts, and measurable innovation outcomes.

The Network of Entrepreneurial Institutions Leaders (NEIL) emerged as a strategic launchpad during the summit, positioning itself as a collective platform for institutional leaders to drive commercialization and enterprise development. Speakers called for structured collaboration through NEIL membership, policy alignment with national priorities, and sustainable models of innovation financing that reduce reliance on donor funding.

The panels and case studies conducted showcased regional and international examples including the Ghanaian Higher Education–TVET Collider Project, demonstrating how cross-sector linkages can translate research into tangible socio-economic impact. These examples reinforced the need for Kenya's universities to adopt more inclusive innovation models that involve youth, women, and communities as co-creators of solutions.

In conclusion, the CEIL Summit 2025 reaffirmed that Kenya's innovation future depends on its institutions' ability to commercialize research, nurture entrepreneurial talent, and form strategic partnerships across sectors. The summit's resolutions call for curriculum reform, structured innovation pipelines, strengthened Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs), venture-based learning models, and sustainable funding mechanisms. Moving forward, KeNIA will continue to champion CEIL as a national platform for leadership in commercialization and institutional innovation, ensuring universities and research institutions play their rightful role in driving Kenya's transformation into a knowledge-based economy.

Attendance Demographics

Wednesday 10th September 2025

NO.	CATEGORY	PAX	MALE	FEMALE
1	TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER OFFICE TRAINING PARTICIPANTS	40	28	12
2	INSTITUTIONAL WORKING GROUP MEMBERS OF THE NEW 11 UNIVERSITIES	35	18	17
3	NEIL COUNCIL MEETING	12	8	4
4	VICE CHANCELLORS TRAINING NEW COHORT	19	14	5

11th September 2025 (Day 1) Participants

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	MALE	FEMALE
251	162	89

12th September 2025 (Day 2) Participants

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	MALE	FEMALE
221	140	81

Speakers

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	VIRTUAL SPEAKERS	MALE SPEAKERS	FEMALE SPEAKERS
40	3	30	10

Section 1: Pre-Events Overview

In the lead-up to the 2025 Commercialization and Entrepreneurial Institutional Leaders (CEIL) Summit, four key pre-events were convened to build momentum and strengthen alignment among innovation leaders, institutional champions, and commercialization practitioners within Kenya's higher education and research ecosystem.

1. Network of Entrepreneurial Institutions Leaders (NEIL) Council Meeting

The NEIL Council Meeting convened members of the Network of Entrepreneurial Institutions Leaders, chaired by Prof. Margaret Jesang' Hutchinson (Ag. Vice Chancellor, University of Nairobi) and co-convened by Dr. Tonny Omwansa (CEO, KeNIA). This first in-person session of the year reviewed progress on the network's institutional strengthening programs, business development efforts, and membership expansion. Updates included the completion of the TTO-as-a-Service (TTOaaS) pilot, new partnerships, and advancement of proposals aimed at enhancing institutional capacity in commercialization and entrepreneurship. The Council also discussed the operationalization of the NEIL Innovation Fund and the establishment of a Technical Advisory Committee to guide implementation and oversight.

Key Outcomes:

- Approval of the NEIL Innovation Fund roadmap and initial governance framework.
- Onboarding of new member institutions and reaffirmation of NEIL's membership charter.
- Commitment to scaling NEIL's commercialization and entrepreneurial programs across universities and TVETs.

2. Technology Transfer Office (TTO) Module II Training

The TTO Module II Training, facilitated under the KeNIA Innovation Academy, brought together Technology Transfer Officers from universities and TVETs for advanced learning on intellectual property management, commercialization planning, and institutional policy alignment. Participants deepened their understanding of IP, negotiation of licensing agreements, and strategies for aligning research outcomes with industry needs. The module also featured practical sessions on IP portfolio management, technology scouting, and building commercialization pipelines within institutional frameworks.

Key Outcomes:

- Enhanced understanding of IP management, technology licensing, and commercialization readiness.
- Development of institutional action plans to integrate TTO operations into broader university structures.
- Strengthened capacity among TTO managers to design and operationalize commercialization policies and frameworks.

3. Entrepreneurial Leaders Program – Vice Chancellors' Training

The Entrepreneurial Leaders Training Program (ELTP) for Vice Chancellors convened university VCs to discuss the strategic role of institutions in driving Kenya's innovation and commercialization agenda. Facilitated by KeNIA, the session explored leadership models for fostering entrepreneurship, resource mobilization, and building innovation-driven academic cultures. Participants examined the relationship between institutional strategy and innovation performance, highlighting the need for entrepreneurial governance and performance metrics that reward commercialization and industry collaboration.

Key Outcomes:

- Commitment to embed innovation and entrepreneurship into institutional strategic plans.
- Agreement to strengthen collaboration between university leadership, commercialization offices, and private sector actors.

- Consensus to establish internal innovation funds and integrate entrepreneurship across curricula.

4. Institutional Working Group (IWG) – Cohort 3 Training

The Institutional Working Group (IWG) Cohort 3 Training gathered innovation and commercialization champions from higher learning institutions to share progress, challenges, and best practices in implementing commercialization strategies. Facilitated by KeNIA and NEIL, the training built on the experiences of previous cohorts, focusing on institutional readiness, resource mobilization, and tracking commercialization outcomes. Participants discussed aligning innovation indicators with institutional scorecards and integrating private sector partnerships for stronger impact.

Key Outcomes:

- Agreement to streamline institutional commercialization policies and documentation processes.
- Reinforcement of peer learning and continuous mentorship among member institutions.
- Shared best practices on building innovation ecosystems through partnerships and regional clusters.

Collectively, these pre-events set the tone for the CEIL Summit by fostering a cohesive, well-prepared network of leaders and practitioners ready to advance Kenya's innovation commercialization agenda.

Section 2: Main Summit Overview

Opening Session Summary

The Commercialization and Entrepreneurial Institutional Leaders (CEIL) Summit 2025 was opened by **Dr. Tonny Omwansa, CEO of the Kenya National Innovation Agency (KeNIA)**. In his remarks, Dr. Omwansa reflected on the CEIL journey since 2024, reaffirming KeNIA's mission to develop and manage Kenya's National Innovation System in line with its mandate under the Science, Technology, and Innovation (ST&I) Act, 2013. He highlighted progress on flagship initiatives including the **Research to Commercialization (R2C) Accelerator, Entrepreneurial Leadership Training Program (ELTP),** and **the Entrepreneurial Institution Maturity**

Framework (EIMF). Reviewing the 2024 resolutions, he announced the expansion of commercialization programs to 25 institutions, rollout of the National Shared TTO Service (TTOaaS), launch of the NEIL Innovation Fund targeting USD 10 million, and the integration of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions into the commercialization ecosystem.

Delivering the opening keynote, **Dr. Kenneth Karanja, Technology Licensing Officer at the University of Minnesota**, emphasized the need for institutional leaders to champion innovation and entrepreneurship by breaking silos between academia, government, and industry. He challenged higher education institutions to rethink their curricula, embrace entrepreneurship, and forge strategic partnerships that align academic research with industrial needs. Dr. Karanja urged universities to act as regional champions of industrialization and innovation, integrating entrepreneurship into teaching and learning to produce job creators rather than job seekers. He stressed that universities must be measured not only by publications but by their ability to translate research into tangible, market-ready solutions that address societal challenges.

The official opening ceremony, led by **Prof. Shaukat Abdulrazak, Principal Secretary for Science Research and Innovation**, featured distinguished guests including **Senator Faki Mohamed Mwinyihaji (Mombasa County), H.E. Governor Andrew Mwadime (Taita Taveta County),** and **Mr. Felix K. Koskei, EGH, Chief of Staff and Head of Public Service.** In his keynote address, Mr. Koskei emphasized that "innovation is no longer an option, but a lifeline," calling for strengthened academia–industry linkages, integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, and sustainable funding mechanisms to advance Kenya's research and innovation capacity. The session concluded with a shared commitment to build sustainable research-to-market pipelines, promote financial resilience of institutions, and deepen cross-sector collaboration. The day set a strong foundation for the summit, reaffirming that breaking institutional silos, commercializing research, and cultivating entrepreneurial leadership are central to driving Kenya's innovation-driven growth.

Highlights of Thematic Discussions

1. Rethinking the Role of Universities in National Innovation

The summit opened with an honest conversation about the evolving role of universities in Kenya's innovation ecosystem. Speakers emphasized that universities can no longer remain "ivory towers" of theory and research; they must become entrepreneurial engines that convert knowledge into impact. Institutions were challenged to rethink their curricula, embed entrepreneurship across disciplines, and align programs with national priorities such as industrialization, digital transformation, and sustainability. Participants agreed that graduates must be equipped not only with academic knowledge but with practical, entrepreneurial skills that enable them to create jobs rather than seek them.

It was acknowledged that for universities to fulfil this role, they must break down silos between academia, industry, and government. The call was clear: Kenya's innovation ecosystem needs stronger coordination, shared infrastructure, and a collective strategy that unites research, policy, and enterprise development.

2. Breaking Silos and Building Collaborative Ecosystems

A recurring theme throughout the summit was the urgent need to strengthen linkages between academia, industry, and government. The discussions revealed that while collaboration frameworks exist, they often remain transactional or short-lived. Participants proposed a shift toward *co-creation models*, where universities, TVETs and industries jointly design solutions to national challenges.

Mechanisms such as shared research facilities, innovation hubs, and joint IP ownership were highlighted as practical ways to build trust and deepen collaboration. The concept of *socializing science*, taking research beyond academic journals, and embedding it within communities and industries emerged as a key pillar for meaningful impact. This approach, participants agreed, would ensure that scientific discoveries translate into scalable products, services, and policies that improve lives.

3. Venture-Based Curriculum and Entrepreneurial Training

A major highlight was the session on Venture-Based Curriculum Models, which explored how universities can reform teaching to foster entrepreneurial mindsets. Speakers emphasized that innovation thrives when students are exposed to practical challenges, mentorship, and real-world experimentation.

Speakers called for a shift from theory-heavy programs to *problem-solving, venture-oriented curricula* that assess students based on creativity, innovation, and execution rather than rote learning. Universities were encouraged to establish dedicated innovation centers to guide students through IP processes, business setup, and product validation. The role of industry practitioners as co-mentors within academic programs was also emphasized, with participants urging institutions to adopt flexible policies that allow structured industry engagement and venture assessment. Additionally, leveraging on the newly launched Student led Innovation Clubs will build a culture of creativity, problem solving and experimentation.

4. Strengthening Research Commercialization and Technology Transfer

The summit underscored that Kenya's research output is vast but under-commercialized. Most institutions still measure success through publications rather than market-ready solutions. Discussions centered on strengthening Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs), promoting IP literacy among researchers, and creating customized commercialization pathways for different sectors.

Speakers called for the establishment of institutional innovation funds and commercialization grants to help bridge the "valley of death" between research and market. The TTO-as-a-Service (TTOaaS) model was showcased as a scalable solution to help universities pool expertise and accelerate technology licensing, venture creation, and IP protection. Participants agreed that the success of Kenya's innovation system hinges on institutionalizing research commercialization as a core function of academic operations.

5. Funding Innovation and Building Sustainable Financial Models

One of the most critical discussions addressed the financing gap in research and innovation. With traditional donor funding on the decline, universities were urged to adopt sustainable funding models and actively pursue partnerships with industry, development finance institutions, and venture funds.

Panelists highlighted the potential of *blended finance* combining grants, equity, and debt to support innovations across different stages. The RICE model (Research, Innovation, Commercialization, and Extension) was presented as a framework for universities to plan and budget holistically across the innovation value chain. Institutions were also encouraged to explore internal revenue generation through intellectual property licensing, consultancy, and spin-off creation, while government and policymakers were urged to introduce incentives, such as tax breaks, to support university-led ventures.

6. Empowering Entrepreneurial Institutional Leadership

The summit reaffirmed that leadership is central to driving innovation culture within universities. Institutional leaders must champion entrepreneurial thinking, inspire risk-taking, and allocate resources that support venture development. The session on the *Network of Entrepreneurial Institutional Leaders (NEIL)* provided an inspiring example of how universities can collaborate to influence institutional reform.

NEIL's role in fostering shared learning, and commercialization partnerships was commended. Participants agreed and called for continued support for NEIL to formalize membership, expand reach, and anchor its activities within Kenya's National Innovation ecosystem.

7. Access to Regional and Global Markets

Participants recognized that scaling innovations requires exposure beyond local ecosystems. Through regional platforms like the East African Community (EAC), COMESA, and AfCFTA, universities and innovators can tap into larger markets, share resources, and attract cross-border investments.

The summit highlighted the importance of international linkages in knowledge exchange, technology transfer, and talent mobility. Universities were urged to integrate regional strategies into their commercialization roadmaps and build alliances with continental and global innovation networks.

Section 3: CEIL Summit Resolutions

- **NEIL Sustainability and Scaling:**
  Establish a stable secretariat with a 3-year plan and rigorous member admission criteria.
- **NEIL Innovation Fund:**
  Formalize and capitalize the fund with diversified instruments for students, researchers, and institutions.
- **Research-to-Commercialization (R2C) Scaling:**
  Operationalize TTOs in all institutions; institutionalize venture pitching at CEIL 2026.
- **Student Innovation Support:**
  Expand student-led innovation clubs and roll out a Student Innovation Challenge ahead of CEIL 2026.
- **TTOaaS Expansion:** Sustain support to existing ventures and scale to 10 ventures annually over 3 years.
- **Institutional Commercialization Support & EIMF:**
  Mainstream EIMF in 25 universities and introduce IP Management Excellence Awards.
- **TVET Involvement:**
  Engage TVETs year-round and host a dedicated TVET commercialization track at CEIL 2026.
- **Private Sector Integration:**
  Deepen collaboration with KEPSA, KAM, and private investors through year-long engagement and CEIL 2026 participation.