Issue 01 2026

NEIL
Network of Entrepreneurial Institutions Leaders
COLLABORATION | LEADERSHIP | INNOVATION

The NEIL Digest

Our journey: Scaling innovations across academic institutions.

MORE THAN 250 ECOSYSTEMS STAKEHOLDERS CONVENED AT CEIL SUMMIT

UPTO 25 INSTITUTIONS CHAMPIONING RESEARCH COMMERCIALISATION

10 JOBS CREATED AND RAISED KES 19M THROUGH THE VENTURE BUILDER PROGRAM

-COLLABORATION
-LEADERSHIP
-INNOVATION

neilafrica.org

MUTHITHI ROAD, WESTLANDS. RAINBOW TOWER 2ND FLOOR

PROLOGUE



Dr. Tonny Omwansa, CEO KeNIA Team Lead.

STATEMENT FROM THE TEAM LEAD

The past year has been a turning point, not just for NEIL, but for the role of universities in driving Africa's innovation and economic future. Across our network, we are witnessing a fundamental shift: universities are moving beyond knowledge generation to become engines of enterprise, commercialization, and societal transformation. This is not an incremental change; it is systemic. Through deliberate investment in leadership, institutional systems, and innovation pipelines, NEIL is helping to redefine how higher education contributes to national development. Our programs have demonstrated that when the right structures are in place, transformation follows. Vice-Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors are now championing entrepreneurial agendas at the highest levels in their institutions.

Technology Transfer Offices are evolving from concept to function, unlocking the value of research. Student and faculty innovators are moving from ideas to viable ventures, creating jobs and addressing real-world challenges.

These outcomes affirm a critical truth: the gap is not in potential, but in systems. NEIL exists to bridge that gap by building the frameworks, partnerships, and capabilities that enable innovation to thrive at scale. To our partners and supporters, this progress reflects the power of catalytic investment. Your support is not only strengthening institutions; it is shaping a generation of innovators, unlocking new markets, and contributing to resilient, knowledge-driven economies. The returns are both measurable and transformative. As we look ahead, our ambition is clear. We will scale shared services like TTOaaS across institutions, deepen leadership engagement, and expand pathways for ventures to access markets and capital. We will continue to position universities at the center of national and continental innovation ecosystems. This is only the beginning. NEIL is building a future where African universities are not just participants in innovation ecosystems but leaders of them.

"The gap is not in the potential of institutions, but in systems. NEIL exists to bridge that gap."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The period between **January 2025 and January 2026 marked NEIL's first full** year of structured programmatic implementation as a national platform uniting over 25 universities to drive research commercialization, entrepreneurial leadership, and student innovation in Kenya.

During this period, NEIL moved from **concept to operational success.** Through the **Entrepreneurial Leadership Training Program (ELTP), Technology Transfer Office as a Service (TTOaaS), Startup School, CEIL Summit, and Student-led programs**, the network directly strengthened institutional leadership, formalized commercialization systems, supported early-stage ventures, and catalyzed cross-university collaboration.

Key Outcome highlights include:

- 14 Vice Chancellors and their deputies trained under the ELTP.
- More than 30 TTO officers and institutional representatives were trained under TTOaaS.
- 3 research-based ventures supported towards commercialization and capacity building for entrepreneurial skills.
- Raised close to 20 million mobilized through various channels to support innovators.
- 10 new jobs created through supported ventures.
- 250+ stakeholders convened at the CEIL Summit.
- Establishment of operational systems across communications, resource mobilization, and governance.

This reporting period demonstrates NEIL's catalytic role in embedding entrepreneurial culture within Kenya's higher education institutions and positioning universities as drivers of economic and social impact.

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ABOUT NEIL

The Network of Entrepreneurial Institutional Leaders (NEIL) was established to address systemic gaps in Kenya's higher education sector, particularly in universities' capacity to translate research into economic and societal success. NEIL is a national shared platform that brings together over 25 member universities to collaborate on initiatives that strengthen institutional innovation, technology commercialization, and entrepreneurial culture.



NEIL's approach is based on the recognition that universities are critical actors in the innovation ecosystem, not only as producers of knowledge but as drivers of economic growth, social development, and technological progress. NEIL brings together expertise, resources, and best practices across institutions to provide a scalable framework for addressing shared challenges, including weak technology transfer systems, limited entrepreneurial capacity among faculty and students, and the absence of coordinated national platforms for innovation engagement.

In 2025, NEIL's work focused on four interrelated pillars:

- **Ecosystem Financing:** Laying the groundwork for the NEIL Innovation Fund, providing catalytic support to high-potential institutional and student ventures.
- **Institutional Capacity Strengthening:** Piloting TTOaaS to establish functional, professionalized technology transfer units capable of managing intellectual property and commercialization pathways that support universities.
- **Leadership Development:** Engaging senior institutional leadership through the Entrepreneurial Leaders Immersion Program to embed entrepreneurial culture into governance, strategy, and operations.
- **Entrepreneurship and Commercialization Support:** Implementing the Venture Builder and Startup School to provide structured guidance and mentorship for student and faculty innovators.

Through these pillars, NEIL builds institutional ownership, peer learning, and national alignment, creating a clear, sustainable framework to advance Kenya's innovation agenda. The network's model emphasizes shared services, evidence-based practices, and strategic partnerships with industry, government, and development actors, ensuring that programs are both relevant and scalable.

ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING



In its first reporting cycle, NEIL invested in building functional operational structures that ensured credibility, coordination, and scalability. This includes registering the organization, recruiting staff, and rolling out programs aligned with the strategic plan.

Success

Eco-system positioning:

- Positioned NEIL as a national thought leader in university commercialization and increased demand for NEIL programs
- Increased cross-institution awareness of commercialization frameworks such as the Entrepreneurial Institutional Maturity Framework (EIMF).

Technology transfer support:

- Established structured program management systems for ELTP, TTOaaS, Startup School, and CEIL.
- Developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) under TTOaaS, now being refined into a national Commercialization Playbook.
- Strengthened resource mobilization pipelines through strategic partnerships and donor engagement and secured up to KES 19 million for the ventures.
- Engaged up to 30 industry partners for venture support.

IP and Policy Management:

- 1 trademark and 1 patent registered.
- Advanced research commercialization policy alignment discussions across 9 institutions.
- Strengthened governance frameworks for leadership, research to commercialization, and venture support.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

1. Entrepreneurial Leadership Training Program (ELTP)



NEIL, in partnership with the Kenya National Innovation Agency, hosted the annual Entrepreneurial Leadership Training Program (ELTP) targeting leaders from 11 universities from different regions in Kenya. The program aims to equip institutional leaders with the skills to champion entrepreneurial education within their institutions, including efforts in leadership and governance, funding and resource mobilization, human capital, policy development and strategy, leveraging alumni support and other partnerships, and creating curricula aligned with entrepreneurial efforts across different fields. The training was offered separately to vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors at different times of the year.

- **Success of the training:**
  - 14 VCs and DVCs trained, thereby improving understanding of revenue models, IP valuation, and policy frameworks.
  - Institutions assessed using the Entrepreneurial Institutional Maturity Framework, to provide a baseline for their entrepreneurial journey.
  - Direct alignment of commercialization strategy within institutional leadership, with leaders committing to action plans for institutional transformation.

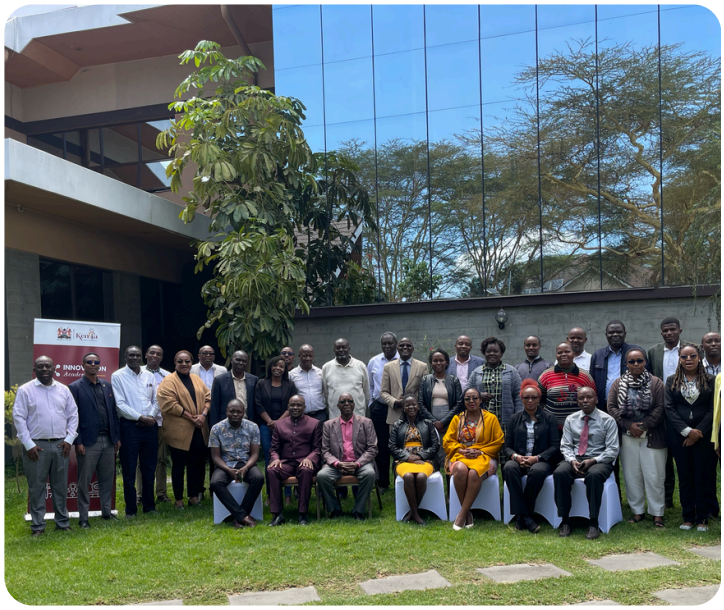
Participants rated:

- Training quality: 4.5/5
- Speaker quality: 4.6/5
- All sessions were rated extremely valuable.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

2. Technology Transfer Office as a Service (TTOaaS)

TTOaaS (Technology Transfer Office-as-a-Service) is a shared technology-transfer office model designed to advance Kenya's research-commercialization agenda. It serves as a national catalytic platform that supports universities and research institutions in developing sustainable innovation pipelines, commercialization capacity, and ecosystem linkages. NEIL started the pilot phase of the program in February 2025, focusing on capacity-building for institutions and the venture-builder program for innovators. The TTOaaS pilot demonstrated the viability of a shared TTO model.



Capacity Building Success Metrics:

30+ TTOs trained from 20 institutions

Strengthened IP literacy and licensing negotiation capacity.

Increased Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) understanding

Outcome:

- 19 universities set up technology transfer offices and appointed an officer.
- Increased TRLs understanding by the TTOs.
- Leaders buy into the commercialization of research.

> **"I am now more confident in taking on the TTO role. Through this training, I have convinced the VC to consider funding for innovation and commercialization, and it is part of a plan for the new financial year"**
>
> **- Scholastica Mutungi, Technology Transfer Officer, University of Embu**

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

3. Venture Builder Program

Through NEIL, three ventures at different technology readiness levels (TRLs): Afyalishe (TRL 5), Crackfox (TRL 4), and Ongataki (TRL 2), were supported in commercialization, market entry, and scaling for their respective innovators. The ventures were also linked to co-founders who would complement their business skills.

Success:

- **10 jobs created (5 Afyalishe, 3 Crackfox, 2 Ongataki).**
- **KES 19 million mobilized through Presidential Innovation Awards and international partners**
- **30+ partners engaged for venture support, e.g. Muthokinju, Tatu City, and Nairobi Hospital retail**
- **Afyalishe added two new retail outlets and improved packaging**
- **1 patent granted; 1 trademark registered.**



Co-founder support

Pairing the venture owners with co-founders contributed to the success of the ventures by:

- Managing time constraints faced by faculty innovators.
- Filling business development gaps.
- Supporting market validation execution
- Conducting stakeholder follow-up and coordination.

The co-founder approach improved execution capacity and accelerated commercialization pathways, especially for early-stage ventures.

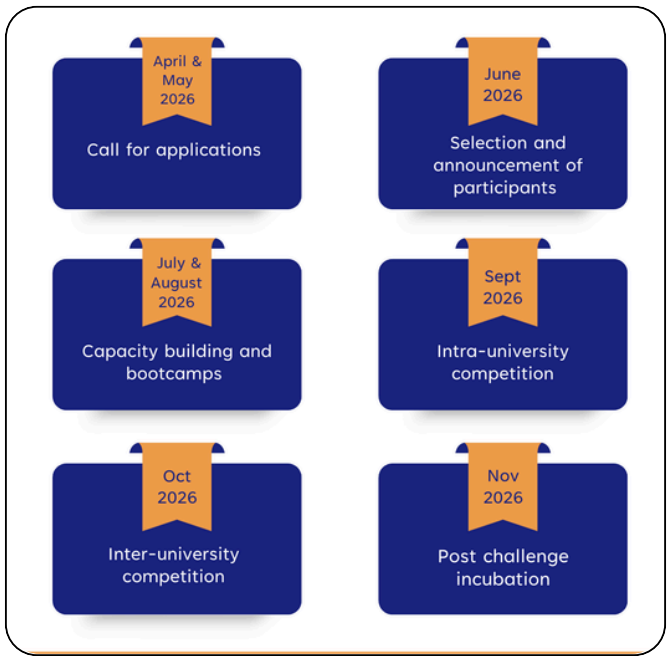
> **The venture builder program gave Cracksfox the business structure and market networks we needed to scale our product. It transformed us from a researcher mindset to an entrepreneurial mindset.**
>
> **— Prof. Jackson Wachira, Founder, Cracksfox**

4. Student Entrepreneurial Support

Since NEIL is focusing on making institutions of higher learning more entrepreneurial, it has also conceptualised and developed programs to bring students on board.

Campus Spark - Student Innovation Challenge

A concept that has been developed aiming at providing students with a platform to pitch their ideas, and have their best innovations compete against other institutions' innovations for seed funding.



Projected success:

- Provide a structured innovation challenge platform.
- Increase visibility of student innovators.
- Identify high-potential ventures for further support.
- Creating a network where universities can co-create.

Projected Outcome:

- Create a pipeline of solid early-stage innovations on campuses.

ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

1. CEIL Summit 2025

NEIL, in partnership with KeNIA, hosted the Commercialisation and Entrepreneurial Institutions' Leaders (CEIL) Summit in September of 2025, convening over 250 thought leaders, industry players, investors, faculty members, and other stakeholders. The Commercialization and Entrepreneurial Institutional (CEIL) Summit served as a cornerstone event for NEIL, fostering high-level dialogue and actionable commitments toward a university-led innovation economy. Based on the documented activities and the strategic framework shown in the provided materials, the main outcomes include:

Strategic & Policy Outcomes

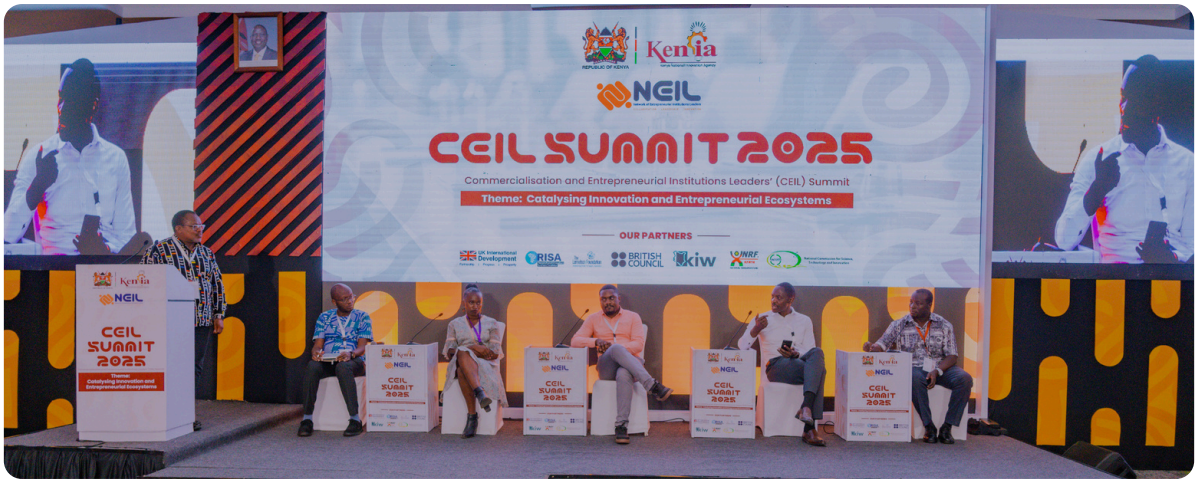
- **Policy Revision Commitments:** Leadership from various institutions committed to revising internal startup and Intellectual Property (IP) policies to be more "innovator-friendly," with some adopting a 60:40 revenue-sharing model in favor of the creator.

Operational & Financial Outcomes

- **Dedicated Funding Allocations:** A direct outcome of the engagement was the commitment of significant internal budgets for innovation, such as the KES 10 million allocated by the University of Embu for the upcoming financial year.
- Expansion of TTO Infrastructure: The summit highlighted the transition from conceptual TTOs to physical, staffed offices, such as the establishment of a dedicated TTO space at Embu University in June 2025.

Partnership & Ecosystem Outcomes

- **Strengthened Industry Linkages:** The summit facilitated formal agreements between academia and the private sector, including MoUs with organizations such as Lipton and Anza Village to support IP registration and tea innovation.
- **Inter-Institutional Collaboration:** NEIL member universities moved toward a "shared services" mindset, particularly through the TTOaaS model, allowing institutions to share legal and commercialization expertise rather than working in silos.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Discussions at the summit laid the groundwork for the ***NEIL Innovation Fund,*** which aims to provide catalytic investment to bridge the "valley of death" for university-born ventures.



Resolutions from CEIL Summit

NEIL Sustainability and Scaling

- Develop programs for VCs, DVCs, faculty, and students.
- Establish a stable secretariat with a three-year runway
- Formalize admission of new members with a robust and rigorous process.

TTO as a Service (TTOaaS)

- Sustain support for the three existing ventures.
- Design a three-year program to support 10 ventures annually.

Launch the NEIL Innovation Fund

- Formal establishment and capitalization (short- and long-term).
- Provide a range of instruments for students and researchers with de-risking capabilities.



Strengthen TVET involvement

- Year-long engagement with individual TVETs.
- Establish a concurrent TVET track at CEIL 2026.

Private Sector Integration

- Enhance year-long engagement with KEPSA, KAM, and similar bodies.
- Increase private sector integration and participation at CEIL 2026.

R2C Scaling

- Support institutions to scale commercialization efforts, with KeNIA's guidance.
- Operationalize Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) in universities.
- Host venture pitching sessions at CEIL 2026.

Student Innovation Support

- Expand rollout of Student Innovation Clubs (beyond the initial 11).
- Implement a Student Innovation Challenge.
- Increase student participation at CEIL 2026.

Institutional Commercialisation Support and EIMF

- Mainstream EIMF (Entrepreneurial and Innovation Management Framework) in 25 universities.
- Prepare to admit 10 additional universities.
- Introduce IP management excellence practices.

2. Entrepreneurial Education Summit

The Network of Entrepreneurial Institutional Leaders (NEIL), in collaboration with the Kenya National Innovation Agency, convened faculty leaders, policymakers, and industry players for the inaugural Entrepreneurial Education Summit in January 2026. The summit delivered several high-success outcomes that move higher education from theoretical instruction to venture-driven results. The summit culminated into:

- **Strategic Policy Resolutions:** Participants adopted formal resolutions to champion structured incubation programs and advocate for national policies that specifically reward faculty for mentorship and commercialization efforts.
- **Resource Mobilization for Students:** A key outcome was the commitment to mobilize dedicated resources to establish student-led seed funds, providing the necessary capital to bridge the gap between academic projects and viable enterprises.
- **Shift to Dual-Reward Systems**: Discussions successfully advocated for a new educational model in which students are rewarded with both academic credentials (certificates) and early-stage seed capital tied to venture performance.
- **Enhanced Industry-Academia Alignment:** The summit successfully



aligned educational outputs with market needs by establishing frameworks for internships, industry mentorships, and challenge-based projects that connect students' ideas to real-world industrial problems.

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- **Systemic Advocacy for Job Creation**: The event strengthened NEIL's position in advocating for a systemic shift in which the primary output of Kenyan universities shifts from producing degree holders to producing active job creators and market-ready innovators.

> **The future of Kenya will not be built by certificates alone. It will be built by entrepreneurial minds, ideas, and ventures.**
>
> -Prof. Shaukat Abdulrazak EBS, PS, State Department for Science, Research and Innovation.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP LEARNING

Denmark Strategic Immersion Visit





In 2025, NEIL leaders undertook a strategic immersion visit to Denmark to study the Danish "Triple Helix" model of collaboration between academia, industry, and government. The visit focused on understanding how strong institutional linkages accelerate applied research, commercialization, and sustainable innovation.

Leaders engaged with world-class innovation hubs, including the Technical University of Denmark Skylab, gaining practical exposure to models supporting Green Transition and Agri-tech commercialization.

Success:

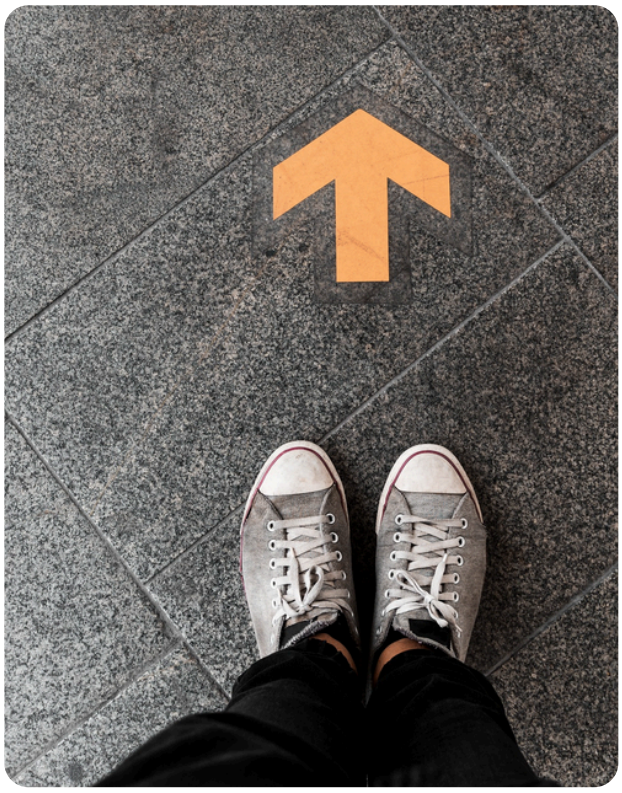
- Enhanced leadership capacity to align research outputs with market-driven sustainability priorities.
- Increased appreciation for structured university–industry co-creation models.
- Deepened understanding of applied research systems that directly link university research to community needs.

The Denmark immersion strengthened NEIL's global outlook and accelerated the localization of internationally proven commercialization models within Kenyan universities.

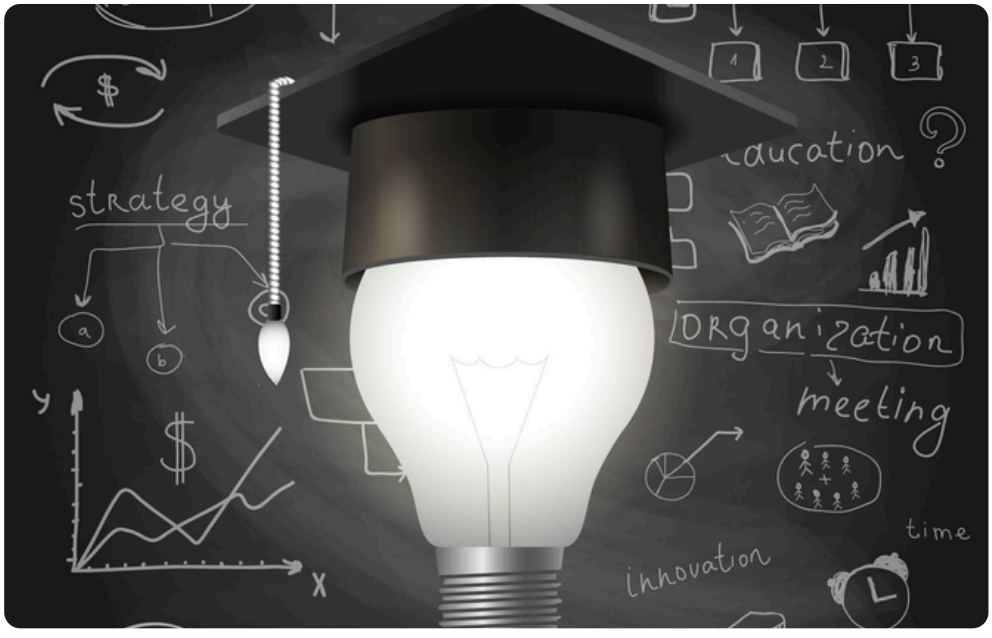
LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

Building on 2025 foundations, NEIL's priorities for 2026 include:

- Expanding TTOaaS across all member universities, refining processes, and strengthening industry partnerships.
- Continuing to support student and faculty innovators through Venture Builder and Startup School, with more robust tracking of outcomes.
- Deepening engagement of university leadership through the Entrepreneurial Leaders Immersion Program, ensuring institutionalization of innovation culture
- Operationalizing the NEIL Innovation Fund, providing structured, catalytic support to high-potential projects.
- Convening stakeholders through CEIL Summit and other national platforms to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange, and alignment with Kenya's innovation policy framework.



The overarching goal is to consolidate a systemic approach to university-led innovation, ensuring that research, entrepreneurship, and institutional transformation continue to contribute meaningfully to national development



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