

AWARDS 2026

WetBlu takes top honours at the Africa SME Summit 2026 Awards

A leather brand, a spice maker and a tallow producer show what value addition looks like for Kenyan SMEs.

BY THE SUMMIT DISPATCH EDITORIAL TEAM · EMARA, OLE SERENI, NAIROBI



Doris Wanjiku of WetBlu by Misshiks on stage at Emara, Ole Sereni, after the brand took first place.

FIRST PLACE · WETBLU BY MISSHIKS

WetBlu by Misshiks, a women-owned Nairobi leather brand founded by Doris Wanjiku, took first place at the Africa SME Summit 2026 awards. EMON Authentic Foods Enterprise, maker of Mannu's Spices, came second, and Smartcom Traders third. All three add value to Kenyan raw materials.

WetBlu makes premium, functional leather bags and accessories designed to last, pairing everyday utility with understated luxury and an African

identity. Its range runs from work bags such as the Malkia and Commander to the Kifaru/Safari and Nyika travel duffels, small leather goods and sandals.

The brand keeps design, specifications, quality, branding and customer experience in-house, and outsources specialist cutting, stitching and assembly. The lean model is built to scale with control, from Kenya into Rwanda and wider East Africa.

The win comes as Kenya pushes for more value addition in leather: KIRDI notes that about 89% of the country's leather exports in 2023 were partially processed wet-blue leather.

Next, it says, is finding its ideal customer and reaching them well, with support in market research, pricing and digital marketing.



Doris Wanjiku and pieces from the WetBlu range.

SECOND PLACE · EMON AUTHENTIC FOODS

Mannu's Spices wins silver with natural seasonings



Presenting Mannu's Spices at the Summit.

Founded in 2023 in Embakasi Central, EMON makes natural ground spices and masalas, from pilau and tea to curry blends, without additives or preservatives. Revenue grew from KSh 800,000 in 2023/24 to KSh 1.6 million in 2025/26.

THIRD PLACE · SMARTCOM TRADERS

Smartcom turns tallow into a wellness range



Smartcom Traders on stage at the Summit.

The woman-owned firm, founded in 2012, launched Smartcom Signature Tallow in 2025 and now makes camel tallow, body butter, lip balm and beard oil. It is seeking working capital and partners to scale.

Inside

2 Five voices on closing the classroom–market gap

3 Nairobi to lead a county–industry–academia group

3 Sell the savings, not the software

4 Sealed for greatness; save the date for 2027

KEYNOTES

Africa SME Summit 2026 · Emara, Ole Sereni, Nairobi

Five voices make the case for closing the gap between classroom and market

From the Principal Secretary to the Summit's convener, the main stage called for partnerships that turn research into businesses that grow.

BY THE SUMMIT DISPATCH EDITORIAL TEAM

Kenya's small businesses do not lack ideas. What they lack, speaker after speaker argued at the Africa SME Summit 2026, is a working bridge between the lecture hall, the laboratory and the market. Five voices, from national government to the Summit's convener, set out how to build it.



Prof. Shaukat Abdulrazak

Principal Secretary, Research & Innovation,
Ministry of Education

The PS opened the case at national level. Africa, he said, has no shortage of talent, ideas or entrepreneurial ambition; the challenge is ensuring that knowledge reaches the marketplace and is brought to scale.

He called for a financing continuum that follows an innovation from research grant and proof of concept to seed capital, credit guarantees, blended finance and patient long-term investment. With the African Continental Free Trade Area opening larger markets, enterprises must match access with quality, productivity and reliable supply. He restated Kenya's aim to raise research and development investment towards at least 2% of GDP.



Dr. Anastasia Mutethya

CECM, Business and Hustler Opportunities,
Nairobi City County

Declaring the Summit officially open, Dr. Mutethya backed a tripartite technical working group of county, industry and academia. Because trade is a devolved function, she said, MSME development sits with the counties, and Nairobi will lead.

Drawing on her career in pharmaceutical research, she said universities remain the missing piece in Kenya's partnerships. She urged young entrepreneurs to use savings and credit cooperatives for affordable credit, and

asked that progress be tracked through data.



Prof. Njenga Munene

Vice Chancellor, Zetech University

Ushered in by Zetech University students, Prof. Munene spoke on behalf of the vice chancellors. His remarks followed the universities' week-long industry-academia residential training, which prepared students and staff to work on real MSME challenges.



Mr. Philip Kabii, CMA

Coordinator, Sustainable Livelihoods
Programme

Kabii described a programme built on income, resilience, food security and strong institutions, with climate shocks such as floods in view. His proposals for partnership covered enterprise ecosystems, peer learning, market linkages beyond borders, climate-smart enterprise and practical AI for small firms.



Eng. Mike Mutungi

Chief Executive Officer, I Choose Life –
Africa

As convener, I Choose Life – Africa brought the four constituencies to one table with its partners. Eng. Mutungi closed the day by delivering the SEALs Charge and conferring the SEALs Certificate on a new cohort of young leaders.

In their words

“Industry and academia must become strategic partners rather than occasional collaborators.”

PROF. SHAUKAT ABDULRAZAK

“Success will not be measured by the number of programmes announced, but by the businesses that grow.”

DR. ANASTASIA MUTETHYA

“Universities should be measured not only by the graduates we produce, but by the enterprises our graduates and research help to grow.”

PROF. NJENGA MUNENE

“Programmes come and go, but the institutions [that carry] the function will remain.”

MR. PHILIP KABII, CMA

“I now charge you to carry the SEALs mission forward in your community and world.”

ENG. MIKE MUTUNGI

THE DAY IN BRIEF

Africa SME Summit 2026 · Emara, Ole Sereni, Nairobi



Delegates at Emara, Ole Sereni, follow Prof. Shaukat Abdulrazzak's address by video on 15 October 2026.

Nairobi to lead a working group of county, industry and academia

OPENING SESSION · BY THE SUMMIT DISPATCH EDITORIAL TEAM

Nairobi City County will lead a tripartite technical working group of county government, industry and academia, Dr. Anastasia Mutethya said as she declared the Summit open.

Because trade is a devolved function, she said, MSME development sits with the counties. She asked for the group to start immediately after the Summit, with the county director as its point of contact, and for its work to be data-driven: mapping businesses, tracking their growth year on year and building in monitoring and evaluation from the start.

Success, she said, will be measured by businesses that grow, investment mobilised, jobs created and livelihoods improved.

BY THE NUMBERS

7.4M

MSMEs power Kenya's economy.

75%

of Nairobi MSMEs close within two years. Planning figure from the County and ICL, to be tested in the 2027 baseline.

TRACK 04 · AI & TECHNOLOGY

Sell the savings, not the software

The AI and technology side track opened with a business visible on any Nairobi street: electric motorcycles. With trackers on the battery and the bike, fleet owners can manage riders, set geofences and switch off a battery when payments lapse. Leasing at around KES 550 a day is turning that into a business young people can start.

"Don't tell me how much you're going to make; tell me how much I'm going to save."

AI & TECHNOLOGY PANEL

The pitch to Kenyan firms, the panel argued, should lead with savings, then better service, then growth: forecasting next month rather than looking back at last month.

A second panellist added a caution: count the full cost of ownership, know who owns your data and keep an exit plan.

WHAT WAS AGREED

Six commitments

- 1 Set up the tripartite working group right after the Summit
County, industry, academia
- 2 Name the county director as point of contact
Nairobi City County
- 3 Map MSMEs on one platform; track growth yearly
Working group, delivery partners
- 4 Build monitoring and evaluation into every intervention
Working group, researchers
- 5 Link young entrepreneurs to SACCOS and affordable credit
SACCOS, County
- 6 Explore subsidised, single-digit credit for qualifying SMEs
County, financial partners

BEFORE YOU BUY TECH, ASK

- What problem does it solve?
- What does it really cost?
- Who owns my data?
- Can I exit if it fails?

THE ROAD AHEAD

Nairobi County Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Strengthening Strategic Plan 2026–2030

Aim: 50 in every 100 supported MSMEs reaching a third year by 2030, up from 25 today. I Choose Life – Africa is delivery partner.



Sealed for greatness

A new cohort of young leaders takes the SEALs pledge at the close of the Summit.



SEALS COMMISSIONING · BY THE SUMMIT DISPATCH EDITORIAL TEAM



SEALs take the pledge.



A new SEAL receives the certificate.



Cutting the commissioning cake.

The Summit closed with the commissioning of a new cohort of SEALs, I Choose Life – Africa's youth leadership programme, supported by Children's Mission, Sweden (Sverige) and the Sustainable Livelihood Programme.

Each SEAL pledged to lead by example, serve others and empower their peers, living by ICL's core values and acting as a channel for the goal of empowering one million young people. Testimonials came from Mark Maina, Comfort Mwanga, Pangani Girls and Aquinas High School.

Eng. Mike Mutungi, Chief Executive Officer of I Choose Life – Africa, delivered the SEALs Charge and conferred the SEALs Certificate on behalf of the Board of Management.

The ceremony ended with the song *Go Light Your World*, the awarding of certificates and cake cutting.

"I now charge you to carry the SEALs mission forward in your community and world."

ENG. MIKE MUTUNGI, CEO, I CHOOSE LIFE – AFRICA

CORE VALUES

**Diversity
Innovation
Collaboration
Excellence**

THE CHARGE

- To live a healthy lifestyle
- To learn and innovate
- To be employable and entrepreneurial
- To be a responsible citizen

SAVE THE DATE

Africa SME Summit 2027

MARCH 2027 · OLE SERENI, NAIROBI

Launch of the Nairobi County Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Strengthening Strategic Plan 2026–2030 and a first look at progress since 2026. Exact date to be announced at africasmesummit.com

PARTNERS

