

PAKASA

By Aloysious Kasoma

Young Ugandan innovators have received a major boost, securing sh1.7b in seed funding to scale social impact projects, enhance entrepreneurship and strengthen the solutions addressing community challenges across the country.

A total of 79 youth groups from five implementing organisations have been awarded seed capital to support their social innovations, marking the start of their journey at the early stage of development.

The awards happened during the National I-UPSHIFT Youth Social Innovation Summit 2025, held at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala last week, which celebrated youth creativity, resilience and entrepreneurship.

YOUTH AS DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Speaking during the summit, Solomon Kayiwa, the executive director of Wezesha Impact, described the gathering as a celebration of young people who are driving change.

"Today is a celebration of resilience for young people. We continue to believe that when you empower the youth with the right skills, they don't just participate in creating the future — they are actually creating it," Kayiwa said.

He highlighted the remarkable creativity emerging from the communities across the country and underscored the summit's role in fostering connection and inspiration.

"Over the months, we have seen incredible creativity in our communities. This summit is an opportunity to connect, share ideas and inspire one another," Kayiwa said.

He emphasised the transformative potential of the youth, saying: "No young person should be left behind. They have the right skills to transform their communities. Young people are a promise, not a problem."

The summit culminated in a major awards ceremony, where the 79 youth groups were recognised for their innovations.

The seed funding will support projects developed through the I-UPSHIFT programme, empowering young people to drive sustainable change.

ABOUT THE I-UPSHIFT

The programme, implemented jointly by the International Labour Organisation and Unicef in Uganda, is a social innovation and entrepreneurship skills-building initiative targeting marginalised adolescents and youth.

Through interactive bootcamps, mentorship and seed funding, the participants learn to design, develop and implement impactful solutions to society issues.

The programme equips youth with seven core 21st-century skills, including problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, communication and leadership, collaboration, hope for the future, and self-esteem. These skills empower



Some of the beneficiaries receiving a dummy cheque for their seed capital during the national I-UPSHIFT Youth Social Innovation Summit at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala recently

YOUTH INNOVATORS SECURE SH1.7B IN SEED FUNDING

participants to become change-makers who transform their communities while inspiring others to take action for social good.

The project is being executed across multiple refugee and host communities in Uganda through the implementing partners including Unleashed, New Life Horizon, RICE West Nile, Windle International Uganda, and Wezesha Impact.

Evans Lwanga, the chief technical officer of the International Labour Organisation, said social innovation is a vital tool for transforming communities.

"Social innovation is a commitment to finding new ways to solve problems," Lwanga said.

"It gives us the tools to tackle challenges and ensure that people's lives truly change."

He said the demographic shifts are reshaping the global workforce. Over 70 outstanding youth groups were awarded innovation

GOVERNMENT BACKS YOUTH

Timothy Ssejjoba, the event (awards) guest of honour from the education ministry, commended the youth innovators for transforming challenges into solutions that address real community needs.

"Many youth struggle because they have limited sources of investment. But you have shown us that innovation begins with the challenges you care deeply about," Ssejjoba said.

He added that the summit aligns with the government initiatives to empower young people and expand the economic opportunities.

"This summit aligns with the Government's efforts to improve livelihoods and create new

opportunities for our youth," he said. Ssejjoba highlighted the Government's commitment to skills development initiatives.

"The Government has continued to support skills through initiatives such as the Parish Development Model," Ssejjoba said, reaffirming the state's focus on youth empowerment.

The 2025 summit marked the grand finale of the I-UPSHIFT project, bringing together all the five implementing organisations to celebrate youth innovation.

Over 1,200 young people have been empowered through the programme, acquiring the skills, mentorship and financial support.

Development Grants, with individual awards including sh18.4m, sh1.05m and sh7.37m, depending on the scale and impact of their

projects. These grants will enable the recipients to further develop their innovation and expand their reach within communities.

TIP
YOUNG PEOPLE ARE A PROMISE, NOT A PROBLEM.