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National News

Policy gaps cripple innovation among universities, says NCHE

The regulator wants the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act amended to facilitate innovations.

BY TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) says policy limitations continue to cripple the development and commercialisation of innovations at several higher institutions of learning.

While speaking at the opening ceremony of the three-day 16th Annual Higher Education Exhibition at Gulu University Playgrounds in Gulu City yesterday, the NCHE's executives called for an urgent amendment of the country's innovation policies and the amend the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001, to facilitate innovations to enable its progress and more impact.

Dr Hajj Mugalu, the NCHE chairperson, tasked the State minister for Higher Education, Dr John C Muyingo, who was the chief guest at the ceremony, to push for the amendments.

"It is our prayer that the Ministry of Education fix these many limitations to unblock the channels for innovation,



State minister for Higher Education Dr John C Muyingo (centre) inspects an exhibition stall at Gulu University yesterday. The minister called for joint efforts in boosting and facilitating innovations. PHOTO/TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

2001

Parliament of Uganda passed the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act in 2001. The Act was amended in 2003 and 2006.

prototyping, and commercialisation, as you have seen when you are going

around these stores. Unless this is done on time, the industrialisation that we

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The 16th exhibition at Gulu University Playgrounds in Gulu City is being held under the theme: "Harnessing Innovation in Higher Education for Accelerated Economic Transformation".

Dr Hajj Mugalu, the NCHE chairperson, said: "The exhibition presents an avenue to monitor and audit compliance of higher education institutions to activate the activities related to research and innovation."

"Today, we meet at a time when the world is experiencing rapid technological achievements, a shifting economic landscape and a growing demand for knowledge-driven solutions that impact society," he added.

aspire to will not be achieved."

Dr Mugalu also urged the Ministry of Education and Sports to fast-track the amendment of the Act to address the regulatory challenges that affect effectiveness, especially the overlapping responsibilities with other regulatory bodies.

He said other hurdles include the weak enforcement mechanism and the legal gaps in the regulatory framework,

in the existing laws, inadequate funding, and slow adaptation of regulatory frameworks to emerging technologies, and limited research and innovation capacity.

"Such overlaps create double regulations, confusion, inefficiency and ultimately eat into the time that would have been dedicated to bringing guidance on research and innovation," Dr Mugalu said.

On Monday, NCHE kicked off the 2026 Higher Education Week with a two-day conference that ended on Tuesday.

Prof Mary Okwakol, the NCHE executive director, said there is a need to devise solutions to the implemented needs, such as limited financial resources and understaffing at institutions of higher education.

"Many institutions, almost all of them, were informing you (Dr Muyingo) that they are unable to transition their innovations into marketable products because of financial constraints. So there is need to devise ways of overcoming that impediment," Prof Okwakol said.

In his speech, Dr Muyingo said the Ministry of Education is intentional in addressing challenges related to innovation in higher education by "focusing on policy revisions and giving strategic direction for sustainable engagements".

However, he stated that it would require joint efforts of the government, universities, industry, partners, and donors to address such challenges.

"Government is aware of the constraints institutions are experiencing in promoting innovation, such as low funding, limited industry engagement, human capital shortages, inadequate infrastructure, digital barriers, modest research culture, and insufficient support ecosystems," Dr Muyingo said.