PEDL-BII Conference 2026 - Research and Practice Conference: The Start-up Ecosystem in Africa and Asia Summary

The PEDL-BII Conference brought together researchers, investors and entrepreneurs to explore how private investment can support small business growth in developing economies. Opening remarks set the scene with evidence on the scale of the challenge, noting that some of the world's fastest-growing economies sit alongside some of the slowest, and that the majority of firms in low-income countries remain informal, single-person businesses. The day's discussions were organised around three central questions: how small firms relate to markets, when is the right moment to intervene, and how to identify the businesses most likely to succeed.

Across three panel sessions, speakers examined different stages of the entrepreneurial pipeline. The first panel looked at seed-stage venture capital, discussing how investors assess early-stage founders and the persistent shortage of local funding in African markets. The second turned to venture builders and accelerators, exploring how these programmes support entrepreneurs before they reach venture capital. The third session widened the lens to ecosystem-level challenges, discussing the data, infrastructure and local partnerships needed to drive structural change, and the respective roles that public and private development institutions can play. Throughout the day, the conference drew a full house and a diverse audience of researchers, investors and practitioners, with lively participation and questions from the floor.