



– Kenya Events Industry at a Crossroads

The Africa Events Summit – Nairobi Ed. White Paper

On 18 February 2026, the East Africa Events Pre-Summit convened 75+ industry stakeholders in Nairobi for a landmark conversation on the future of the events industry.

Prepared by the AES Official Event Planner:
Billion Events EA

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Executive Summary

On 18 February 2026, the East Africa Events Pre-Summit convened 75+ industry stakeholders in Nairobi for a landmark conversation on the future of the events industry.

The forum hosted by Billion Events EA brought together a diverse representation of the ecosystem including event planners, promoters, venues, AV companies, artists, artist managers, media, security providers, entertainment lawyers, caterers, DJs, dancers, logistics firms, tourism players, and industry associations.

The discussion revealed a shared sentiment across the room: the industry has grown significantly through resilience and self-learning, but it now stands at a critical point where collaboration, standards, and professionalism will determine its future trajectory.

Participants reflected on the past, assessed current challenges, and explored opportunities that could shape a stronger and more sustainable future for the events industry across Kenya and the wider East African region.



1. Background to the Pre-Summit

The East Africa Events Pre-Summit was convened as an industry-led conversation designed to create space for honest dialogue about the future of the events ecosystem.

Moderated by respected media personality **Azeezah Hashim** and hosted by renowned corporate MC **Ian Muiruri**, the gathering brought together voices from across the events value chain, including planners, promoters, production companies, artists, venues, media, security providers, and other key stakeholders.



The room included experienced industry leaders and practitioners such as Eric Mwanzia, Chairman of EMAK; events consultant Edward Okello; Lena, manager of the Kenyan band Wanavokali; music executive and manager to Alikiba, Benjamin Otwal; Juliet Ngugi, co-founder of Africentric Entertainment; Mary Wangui, Marketing Manager at Sarit Expo Centre; Kingsley Litali, Director of Crimeshield Security; Ciiru Kiiru, CEO of PS Audio Visual Ltd; MICE analyst Simon Peter; Martin Kibati, CEO of Sage Events; recording artist Maandy; as well as creatives such as DJ Grauchi, MC Gogo, among many others who contributed valuable perspectives to the discussion.

Industry associations including AKBE, EMAK & EOAK were also represented, reflecting the importance of collaboration between practitioners and organized industry bodies.

The overwhelming response from participants was clear: the industry had long waited for such a conversation. Many attendees noted that the time allocated for the session was not enough, as the depth of issues and opportunities raised showed how much the industry needed a platform to reflect, learn, and collectively chart a way forward.



2. The Industry's Journey – From Improvisation to Professional Growth

Participants reflected on how the events industry in Kenya and East Africa has evolved over time. The early stages of the industry were largely driven by hotels that provided conference spaces and basic event services such as projectors and meeting rooms. Over time, the demand for specialized services led to the emergence of service providers including AV companies, entertainers, and decorators.



As the industry matured, the role of event planners, promoters, and agencies began to grow, creating a more complex ecosystem of professionals supporting live experiences and corporate events.

A defining characteristic of the industry's development has been self-learning.

As moderator Azeezah Hashim noted, much of the industry's growth has been driven by individuals teaching themselves the craft and building systems along the way. While this resilience has allowed the industry to grow, it has also resulted in the formation of habits that may now need to be reconsidered.

Despite these challenges, the industry has achieved important milestones including:

- Increased demand for professional event planning services
- Growth of entertainment brands and artists
- Investments in production infrastructure such as audio-visual technology
- Rising audience appetite for concerts and live experiences

3. Current Challenges Facing the Industry

While the industry has grown significantly, participants acknowledged several challenges that continue to affect its sustainability and growth. One of the most widely discussed issues was the culture of undercutting within the industry.

- **Undercutting and Price Wars**

Events consultant **Edward Okello** emphasized that undercutting has become one of the industry's most damaging habits, affecting margins, quality, and the ability to fairly compensate technical teams and service providers. When professionals continuously lower their pricing to win business, the result is often a reduction in production quality and unsustainable business models.

- **Security and Crowd Management**

Security was highlighted as another critical issue. Security expert and the Director Crimeshield Security Ltd **Kingsley Litali** emphasized that security is too often treated as an afterthought in event planning. **The industry acknowledged that security planning must be placed at the center of event design, particularly for large concerts where poor planning can lead to serious safety risks.**

The discussion also highlighted problematic practices such as allowing unpaid attendees into events through personal connections, which undermines both revenue models and safety planning.

- **Treatment of Local Artists**

Music executive **Benjamin Otwal** raised concerns about the disparity in how local and international artists are treated.

He noted that audiences are increasingly aware of these differences, especially in the age of social media where backstage experiences and production standards are often documented publicly.

This disparity can influence audience perception of value and affect how local artists are valued within the market. **Lena** - Manager Wanavokali insisted that this disparity did not make sense especially in the Kenyan soil and that better needed to be done.

At the same time, participants acknowledged that local artists also need to continue strengthening their performance standards and showmanship to compete globally.

Fragmentation and Lack of Standards

Participants also discussed the absence of clear industry standards.

Without agreed benchmarks for quality, pricing, and operational practices, the industry risks fragmentation and inconsistent service delivery. Many participants agreed that the industry must take the lead in developing its own standards before external regulation becomes necessary.



4. Infrastructure Limitations

Another recurring theme was the need for larger and more advanced event infrastructure.

Participants noted that Kenya and much of East Africa currently lack venues capable of hosting very large-scale concerts.

The absence of infrastructure capable of supporting events of 90,000 attendees or more limits the region's ability to attract some global productions. This gap presents both a challenge and an opportunity for future investment in the live entertainment ecosystem.

5. Technology and the Future of Events

Technology was identified as both an opportunity and a potential disruption.

Corporate MC **Ian Muiruri** highlighted how technological advancements — such as venues installing permanent audio-visual infrastructure — could reshape the business landscape for service providers.

Participants acknowledged that industry professionals must remain aware of technological shifts and adapt their capabilities to remain competitive.

Technology platforms supporting learning, industry verification, and ecosystem coordination were also discussed as potential tools for strengthening the industry.

6. The Case for Professionalization and Specialization

Several participants emphasized the importance of professional training and specialization.

MICE analyst **Simon Peter** highlighted the need to treat event management as a discipline that can be studied, documented, and improved through structured learning.

Specialization was also encouraged as a pathway to higher quality service delivery.

By focusing on specific areas of expertise, professionals can invest more deeply in equipment, training, and innovation, ultimately raising the standard of the industry as a whole.

The EMAK Chair and CEO The Arts Group **Eric Mwanzia** further shared on the necessity for practitioners to be skilled just like a doctor is and calling for further regulation as per to the current requirements within the country.



7. The Need for Collaboration

Perhaps the most widely shared sentiment throughout the discussion was the need for stronger collaboration.

The Founder & CEO of Billion Events, **Ian Migwi**, described the events industry as a shared table from which the entire ecosystem eats.

If stakeholders undermine that table through destructive competition and declining standards, the entire ecosystem suffers.

Collaboration, therefore, was seen not as an optional ideal but as a necessary condition for the industry's future growth.

Martin Kibati, CEO Sage Events further shared of a future that would have more of collaboration where the industry would work together by each specialising on what they were good at and that would drive the need for collaboration and result in higher quality delivery for our clients.

Participants agreed that collaboration could begin with continued dialogue, joint initiatives, and shared commitments to professional standards.

8. Emerging Opportunities

Despite the challenges discussed, participants expressed strong optimism about the future.

The industry continues to benefit from:

1. Growing demand for live experiences
2. Expanding tourism opportunities
3. Increasing global interest in African culture
4. Rising local talent across music and entertainment

Many participants expressed confidence that the region has the potential to host world-class events if the industry continues to evolve.

9. Key Recommendations from the Discussion

Several priorities emerged from the conversation as critical steps toward strengthening the industry.

These include:

1. *Ending destructive undercutting practices*
2. *Developing industry standards and guidelines*
3. *Investing in professional training and specialization*
4. *Prioritizing safety and security in event design*
5. *Encouraging collaboration across the ecosystem*
6. *Strengthening production quality and professionalism*

Participants also proposed developing industry white papers and knowledge resources that could guide future development.

10. The Road Ahead

The East Africa Events Pre-Summit in Nairobi was never intended to be the final conversation. Rather, it was designed as the first step in a larger regional process aimed at bringing together voices from across East Africa to reflect on the state of the industry and collectively shape its future.

The Nairobi conversation revealed both the depth of the challenges facing the industry and the strong willingness among practitioners to engage openly and constructively in addressing them. Participants expressed a clear desire for the dialogue to continue, expand, and include a broader range of stakeholders from across the region

Building on the momentum of the Nairobi gathering, the Pre-Summit series will now continue across other East African markets, with upcoming conversations planned in Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.



The Pre-Summit was never intended to resolve every issue facing the industry. Instead, it served as the first step in a longer journey.

Participants agreed that the conversation must continue and deepen, culminating in the Africa Events Main Summit later in the year where stakeholders can develop more concrete frameworks for the industry's future.

The road ahead is therefore both ambitious and hopeful: a path defined by continued dialogue, shared purpose, and a collective commitment to shaping a stronger future for the industry.

Conclusion

The events industry in East Africa has grown through resilience, creativity, and determination.

Yet the conversation at the Pre-Summit made one thing clear: the next phase of growth will require intentional collaboration, stronger standards, and a shared commitment to professional excellence.

As one participant summarized during the discussion:

“The future is ready for us — but securing it will take effort.”

The East Africa Events Pre-Summit marks an important first step in that journey.

Resources

1. [The Conversation Highlight Video](#)
2. [The White Paper \(View & Download\)](#)
3. [Official Event Planner Website](#)
4. [Instagram Media Post](#)



We extend our deepest gratitude to the following partners. Their vision, resources, and commitment were the driving forces behind the success of the AES Pre-Summit.





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