

Technology and Knowledge Transfer

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Higher Education Institutions and SMEs Do they need each other?

Kenya aspires to attain growth in Science and Technology in line with the STI Act 2013. This aspiration is driven by the need for social-economic advancement through enterprise and industrialization. Universities and businesses have a big role to play to attain this quest.

Higher education institutions and research institutions spend a considerable amount of time, resources and finances to study the issues that affect business especially in their environs. The business community (SMEs) on the other hand is very cooperative in supplying the researchers with the information about their day-to-day business experiences that they so much need to analyze and make recommendations from. The compiled information ends up packed in form of theses that are nicely arranged in the university libraries.

The SMEs on the other hand encounter issues whose solutions lie within the research outputs that they have no access to. Not only do they lack the access to research outputs, but also lack the access to technology and innovation that comes from these institutions. The Technical University of Kenya, among other institutions of research also delve into research on innovation and technology application in business and entrepreneurship.

Dr. Pamela Mreji, a lecturer at The Technical University of Kenya realized this dearth of a gap in innovation and technology transfer between the institutions of higher education and SMEs. As a principal investigator, she sought funding to study the extent of knowledge sharing between universities and SMEs. This is critical, given that SMEs can immensely benefit from research and technology innovation in universities. This called for involvement of the Technical University of Kenya, the business community (SMEs) and other stakeholders to enhance the business arena in Nairobi County. She worked hand in hand with her colleagues as her co investigators; Prof. Alfred Orina (In charge of institutional support), Prof. Evans Sagwa (in charge of stake holder engagement) and Prof. Levi Mbugua (in charge of research). She also engaged consultants; Dr. Lilian Lihasi (in charge of inclusivity of those in danger of inclusion), Dr. Ruth Wambui (in charge of communications) and Ms. Steva Nyawade (in charge of monitoring and evaluation).

Second dissemination Workshop at Meridian Hotel. An input by Dr. Lilian Lihasi.

She also engaged research assistants from her department. The project is funded by RISA (Research & Innovation Systems in Africa) in collaboration with the Technical University of Kenya.

The study results were disseminated in two workshops held in Meridian Hotel, Nairobi on 26th of April and 17th of May 2023. Various stakeholders were invited; from the higher education institutions, SMEs, regulatory bodies, advocacy groups and students' population. In the first workshop, the project was launched by the University. The second workshop was more SME focused and involved more discussions



Dr. Pamela Mreji, the Principal Investigator

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Prof. Austin, Director, Research & Knowledge Exchange at TUK explaining to the participants about the support of the university to the envisioned hub

Prof. Austin, Director, Research & Knowledge Exchange at TUK assured the SMEs that, in full support of the project, he would ensure that the information, innovation and technology generated by the university is accessible to them. He also called upon them to feel free to visit the university in case they had business ideas that they needed to be supported in, regarding innovation, technology or use of equipment that is available in the university's laboratories. Coming from a chemistry background, he sensitized entrepreneurs on the safe and secure handling of chemicals due to their inherent hazardous nature. He called upon them to contact the university for guidance/ training and the testing of chemicals used in production and the finished products.



Discussion session led by Prof. Levi

The advocacy groups came in handy to explain how they support business in their different lines of interests; some support women, others support people living with disabilities, others the youth and others generally support innovation in business in terms of training, funding, incubating, research, marketing while others were open to collaborations with entrepreneurs.



An innovator showing her product and seeking support from the workshop participants

Higher Education Institutions

Some of the invited participants from the higher education institutions echoed Dr. Pamela's observation of the challenges that affect knowledge and technology transfer between the higher education institutions and the SMEs.

However, it was noted that institutions like Kenyatta University has an incubation center where learners inject their innovative ideas for support. There was a counter indication from the student representatives present in the workshop that the incubation centers take advantage of innovators by apportioning themselves a bigger share of copyrights/ IP rights generated from the innovations which was not in any way captivating or encouraging.

The workshop had representatives from the Catholic university of East Africa, Zetech university, Kenyatta university, Mount Kenya university, and several others who had given their apologies.



Some Higher Education Institutions representatives participating in the workshop

