



The Role of Kenyan Universities in Promoting Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises

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Abstract

The following presentation is normative more so than analytical in the classical academic sense. Based on five years of presence in Kenya, the presentation observes and argues the following. First, Kenya has almost no share in the world prevalence of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). 80% of its potential growth-creating enterprises die before they reach beyond the family-owned stage. Few of them, even if they may have potential IPR to unfold/defend, work with universities. Secondly, a close, long-sighted collaboration between Universities, Industries and Government is requested to mobilize the potential of the Kenyan society when it comes to positioning itself in the global competition among nation states ("triple helix"). This requires proactive initiatives from all three parties and ideally an exchange of staff among the players. In addition, unless universities, public as well as private, contribute through developing their learning methodologies away from primarily requesting students to reproduce at the unit-exams what the lecturer informed them about, we shall not be able nurture and unleash the potential of innovations and entrepreneurship. Universities must support a mistake-are- allowed (or even encouraged!) culture and mindset, once students do their outmost. Universities in addition must pro-actively take upon them their key role of research-based institutions generating IPR. The fundamental and applied knowledge needed to implement strategies for Kenyan growth in alliance with Government and Industry must come from universities and unfold within specific partnerships with industry following strategic goals developed in dialogue with Government. We need role models of different ways of teaching and learning and a systematic Training of Trainers to develop a different mindset among university lecturers, which can subsequently lead to changes in the unit-based curricula, at least at degree-levels. Serving to illustrate the above, Copenhagen Business School-Executive in partnership with Equip Africa Institute, has developed a 16-month hands-on problem-solving program for SME leaders and owners. The program, leading to a master degree for executives, sets out to bridge the gap between academia and business and involves assignments on how to create business growth and value addition to Kenyan companies in Kenya and when expanding abroad.

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