



Statement
by
Prof. Mabel Imbuga PhD, EBS
Vice Chancellor
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology
during the official closing ceremony
Micro and Small enterprises Technological innovations and Business Clinic Saturday
May 28, 2011
Nyayo Gardens, Nakuru

The Event Organizers

Exhibitors and other participants

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel honored to stand before you to perform the official closing ceremony of the five day technological innovations forum that has brought together a number of the country's Micro and Small Enterprise (MSE) to exchange useful information and as well showcase their products. I thank the organizing committee for their effort that has made the staging of this fete successful.

The importance of the Micro and Small Enterprise sector in Kenya cannot be over-emphasized. We are all aware of its contribution to employment creation, poverty

reduction and income generation which makes a major contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Unfortunately, the sector suffers numerous challenges and constraints that inhibit its vertical growth. Key among these is the poor quality of products and limited product range resulting in low competitiveness. The poor quality can be attributed to the low levels of technological innovations and technology acquisition and adoption among the MSE operators. Specifically, MSEs operate in a weak environment that hampers coordination and transfer of appropriate technology.

Technological advancement in any sector depends on the level of efforts made towards finding new products and processes that target the needs of the market. This can be achieved through research and development, adoption and adaptation of technologies available elsewhere.

Unfortunately, low levels of education and technical training of some of the MSE operators, and inadequate financial capacity to acquire available technology and infrastructure inhibits the use of appropriate technology. In addition, institutions such as Youth Polytechnics and other middle level colleges which are expected to provide technical services to MSEs have been found to be weak and lacking in specialized capacity to meet the needs of the sector.

It has also been observed that institutions with such capacity have not put in place adequate programmes needed to create linkages with MSEs in order to facilitate appropriate flow of information. Consequently, whatever available technology is rarely accessed by MSEs.

It must, therefore, be recognized that growth and development of the Micro and Small Enterprise sector in Kenya will largely depend on the quality and range of products. This will, to a large extent, depend on the level of technology and technological innovations employed in the production process.

I am, therefore, pleased to note that this Micro and Small Enterprise Technological Innovation and Business Clinic has provided MSEs with the rare opportunity to interact and share technological information with technology providers and researchers from relevant public institutions and the industry at large, including fellow MSE innovators and entrepreneurs. I hope that the MSEs have taken advantage of this opportunity in order to create necessary linkages and networks, and have gathered information from this exhibition that will help them to adopt and adapt new technologies for improved quality of their products and services.

The participation of Universities, Research Institutions and Technical Training institutes is quite encouraging. As you may be aware, we at JKUAT have been active in the promotion of this kind of events designed to uplift the living standards of our people. As the only technological university in the country, JKUAT remain a leader in training, research and innovation in a number of disciplines notably agriculture, engineering, enterprise development, built environment, health sciences and applied sciences. This has been motivated by our desire as a university to undertake a comprehensive market study to determine the modern requirements in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the various disciplines that we offer. This explains why our researchers and alumni continue to receive accolades for their innovativeness.

Indeed, I want to remind you that researchers have made considerable advances in the enterprise of technology and innovations. So far the university researchers have pioneered up to 22 novelties that have received recognition in terms of patents and trademarks from the Kenya Industrial Property Institute and are now ready for commercialization. The products mainly in foods, chemicals, agricultural, engineering and beauty should certainly generate interest for those of you keen in investing in small scale industries. Indeed, our challenge as a university is how to proceed to the next stage of mass production which is crucial in wealth creation agenda for our people.

I encourage those of you in this forum to take up the challenge to invest in the production of these products in the form of SME's. As a university, we are willing to assist those keen in investing in these kinds of ventures. We can do this by organizing subsidized technology transfer training programmes for communities or groups keen in investing in the small scale production of our products. We are for example currently engaged with the Juja Community, our neighborhood who are now running a soap production plant. In this particular engagement, JKUAT is attempting to instill new and productive ways of empowering majority poor in society who have unfortunately been socialized and hooked to partake unproductive and often treacherous trade of Jua Kali, and hawking leaving the lucrative occupation of industrial production to the elite.

I take this opportunity to invite participants and exhibitors to find time and visit us at our Juja campus so that you can find out what the university has for you. We also hold an annual open day in the month of September at our Juja campus as well as participate in the Nairobi International Trade Fair and the Central Agricultural Show central. These are events that you will not afford to miss.

At the same time, the country needs to explore more avenues for providing steady alternative sources of technology through importation of relevant technologies from other countries such as India, South Korea, Pakistan, China, among others. Similarly, the Government should consider providing duty waiver on certain basic engineering machines so as to make them easily accessible to MSEs.

In addition, the Government needs to seriously consider increasing funding for Research and Development (R&D) particularly in areas targeting the MSE sector. Facilitating activities such as reverse engineering can greatly help in generating home grown MSE-friendly technologies.

As I conclude, I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all the stakeholders and other strategic partners who have worked tirelessly to make this Micro and Small Enterprise Technological Innovations and Business Clinic a success. We must commend the partnership and collaborative effort displayed by various institutions and organizations. It called for a lot of sacrifice to host this memorable event. In this regard, I wish to thank the Ministry of Labour, the Youth Enterprise Fund, the National Council for Science and Technology, NSSF, ILO-WEDGE, KIRDI, NHIF, KEBS, Weights & Measures, GSI, Practical Action and the Municipal Council of Nakuru for this tremendous effort. I am sincerely overwhelmed by the collaborative spirit exhibited towards supporting this important sector of our economy. We highly appreciate this gesture and look forward to your continued collaboration and support.

With these remarks, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my pleasure and duty to declare this Micro and Small Enterprise Technological Innovations and Business Clinic officially closed.

I thank you for listening to me.