



*Konza Tehnopolis Development Authority chief executive Engineer John Tanui.*

Local universities have been asked to up and strengthen the level of collaboration between industry and academia to foster more innovation and entrepreneurship that suits the needs of the nation.

This comes hot on the heels of a World Economic Forum’s “Global Competitiveness” report which ranks Switzerland as the most competitive country in the world since 2014, with her success primarily linked to investments in creating an efficient system of education and research that links the academic fraternity to the industry. ·

Further, the Bloomberg Innovation Index 2015 ranked Kenya at position 92 out of 141 with a score of 30.19 percent on innovation.

“This is good progress, however, there is a growing concern about Kenya’s poor track record on the transfer of technology from the university to the industry and the commercialization of academic research.

As a country, we rank poorly in the number of registered patents and very few universities have commercial spin-offs that they can identify with. This can be largely attributed to lack of strong Technology Transfer Offices that are to naturally focus on building strong collaboration between the industry and universities,” said the Konza Technopolis Development Authority (KOTDA) chief excutive John Tanui.

Engineer Tanui was speaking at a forum held last week at the University of Nairobi which brought together students and industry stakeholders to discuss the role of universities in building innovation ecosystems.

He noted that despite the fact that universities play a critical role in advancing Kenya’s innovation efforts due to their wealth of mind capital and ability to generate as well as attract the best talent, there was a less than ideal level collaboration between the academia and industry, which is denying this country the innovations it badly needs.

“We need to increase the university – industry interaction. This way we have an opportunity to broaden our professional expertise and stimulate innovation,” he said.

He therefore challenged participants to work closely together to facilitate the churning out of innovative solutions from the theories and research work that both the universities and industry have developed.

“Exposing students to more practical experiences will yield the desired results of an industrialized economy that spurs growth and development. The industry on the other hand will see greater value in working with the academia to the extent that it advances market objectives,” he added.

“Other universities and countries have done it and we can do it too. We have made progress, as a country. We are unmatched in research expenditure compared to the rest of our Sub Saharan counterparts. The World Economic Forum’s global competitive report 2015 affirms this, putting Kenya in position three after South Africa and Egypt.”

However, he noted that Kenya still has a long way to go compared to South Korea, whose Research and Development spending increase at an annual average rate of 12 percent, settling on 59.3 trillion dollars in 2013. This is equivalent to 4.15 percent of the nation’s gross domestic product, the highest percentage in the world according to a 2015 Yonhap news agency report .

“Kenya needs to borrow from this example and walk in the same lane to push her research spending up with the view of increasing focus on scalable innovations.

That is why we are determined, through the upcoming Konza Regional Innovation Hub, to build a platform for collaboration, capacity building and knowledge sharing between government and the industry at large,” he said.

” The hub will host, among other things, university campuses, Centers of Excellence and innovation centers to be established by local universities and the private sector.”