

# PS Mukhwana on why more tertiary institutions should intentionally support SMEs

The small enterprises are responsible for 24 per cent – or nearly a quarter – of the country’s gross domestic product



Dr Juma Mukhwana, Principal Secretary, State Department for Industry, Ministry of Trade, Investments and Industry.

through Linkages”

Dr Mukhwana considers this theme as relevant because SMEs remain the key creators of jobs in the country.

Citing current data, the PS says this sub-sector accounts for more than 14 million jobs, or a whopping 93 per cent of the national workforce.

The small enterprises are re-

sponsible for 24 per cent – or nearly a quarter – of the gross domestic product (GDP), the PS notes.

“Collaborative efforts such as research partnerships, technology transfer, mentorship programmes, and internships, can facilitate the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and resources,” says Dr Mukhwana.

He adds that the State Department for Industry, which he heads,

promotes partnerships between SMEs, academia, and the private sector in skill and technology development, and in creation of policies that encourage industry research and innovation in the country.

The PS says the partnerships can arm SMEs with the latest advancements in technology, managerial skills, and market insights. These, he argues, will make the enterprises more productive and competitive.

Dr Mukhwana says that as hubs of knowledge creation, innovation, and skill development, universities have a lot they can share with small enterprises.

He lauds MKU for expanding access to higher education and encouraging its students to create enterprises instead of waiting to be employed.

An entrepreneurial university, MKU opened a campus in Kigali, Rwanda, more than a decade ago. Early this year, the Government of Rwanda granted the campus the autonomy to become a fully-fledged university. It has since been re-named Mount Kigali University. The rebranded university is also holding its graduation ceremony today for 625 students who studied in Rwanda under MKU.

## How university is increasing access to higher learning



Mount Kenya University Council Chairperson, Dr Vincent Gaitho.

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Within this year, Mount Kenya University (MKU) has established two new open, distance and electronic learning (ODEL) centres in the country. This brings the number of such centres to eight.

The university’s council chairman, Dr Vincent Gaitho, says this investment aims to accelerate access to higher education.

He points out that the council approved the establishment of the Embu centre – the latest in the MKU stable – soon after the opening of the Machakos centre in January.

MKU now has ODEL centres in Kisumu, Kericho, Kakamega, Kisii, Kitale, Malindi, Machakos, and Embu. Dr Gaitho says learners under ODEL can also access services from the university’s campuses spread across the country.

The observes that in quickly approving the establishment of the centres, MKU is enabling increased enrolment to give more people access to higher education wherever they are.

Dr Gaitho says the university has developed a robust ODEL platform that allows students who would otherwise not be able to attend physical classes, to study at MKU. These include students who live abroad and those in far-flung areas of the country.

MKU, the council chairman adds, has also developed satellite campuses and regional support centres. Thus, the university is present in different parts of Kenya. It also has a footprint in parts of East Africa, specifically in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Somaliland.

Dr Gaitho encourages students to enrol for higher qualifications, noting that in support of Kenya’s move towards a knowledge-driven economy by 2030, MKU has relevant curriculum to support the quest. “MKU has a rich menu of programmes in health sciences, pure and applied sciences, social sciences and liberal arts. Infrastructure and equipment to support training in these programmes is available, and we are expanding it,” says Dr Gaitho.

In addition, the university has an innovation centre to support the translation of knowledge into market-driven products.

Also, MKU has a TVET arm to support technical and vocational education through Equip Africa Institute and Equip Africa college of Medical and Health Sciences.

Available data shows that Africa’s university enrolment remains low, estimated at 12 per cent in 2013, compared to the world average of 33 per cent, 68 per cent for Europe, 62 per cent in North America, 52 per cent for South America, and 28 per cent for Asia.

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## MKU equips enterprising students with business skills

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Mount Kenya University (MKU) is tackling the unemployment crisis by empowering young people within and outside its campus with entrepreneurship skills.

The university’s entrepreneurial bent is described in a book chapter entitled, “Unemployment Intervention in Africa: A Case Study on Mount Kenya University’s Graduate Enterprise Academy”. This chapter is contained in the book authored by MKU chancellor and University of the West of Scotland (UWS) don, Prof John Struthers, and Dina Nziku, titled, “Enterprise and Economic Development in Africa”.

MKU’s contribution towards expanding the pool

of entrepreneurs in Kenya goes beyond its operations at the Graduate Enterprise Academy (GEA), established by the university’s founder and chairman, Prof Simon Gicharu, a notable education entrepreneur in East Africa. GEA supports enterprising MKU students to establish and nurture their ventures.

The university has been running a programme known as Students Training for Entrepreneurial Promotion (STEP) in partnership with Leuphana University that is based in Germany. Students who undergo training under this programme initiated by the German university are given seed money of \$100 (Sh15,200 in as per the current exchange rate) to do business with.

The students learn business skills in 12 weeks, in

sessions taught by the MKU-certified STEP trainers. They practise the theory they learn through practical engagements in business. They are allowed to keep the profit, but return the capital. STEP training uses real money, real business, and in real-time.

Additionally, in collaboration with a local public university, and under the annual sponsorship of the Kenya National Commission for Unesco, MKU-certified STEP trainers offer entrepreneurship training to 100 youths per county at a time. This initiative has been running for more than five years. So far, a total of 600 youths from Isiolo, Nairobi, Kajiado, Uasin Gishu, Bungoma, and Garissa counties, have been trained. Another 100 from Nyamira County will receive training next year.



From left: Mount Kenya University’s Pro-Chancellor Dr Vincent Gaitho (left), Vice-Chancellor Prof Deogratius JAGANYI, co-founder Dr Jane Nyutu, and principal, student and alumni affairs Peter Waweru, are joined by students and staff to plant trees at the university’s Botanic Gardens. MKU students and staff planted more than 5,000 trees on November 13, the National Tree Growing Day declared by the government in a drive to plant 15 billion trees.



PhD graduands.

Higher education Mount Kenya University holds its 24th graduation ceremony

# Thika set to host the first CAREED conference to be held outside UK, as MKU forms more partnerships

CAREED is a think-tank domiciled in the University of the West of Scotland's School of Business and Enterprise

BY EVANS ONGWAE

The Centre for African Research on Enterprise and Economic Development (CAREED) is set to hold its next international conference in Kenya. CAREED has chosen Mount Kenya University's (MKU's) Thika campus as the venue for the two-day event planned for June 27-28, 2024.

CAREED is a think-tank domiciled in the University of the West of Scotland's (UWS's) School of Business and Enterprise. The Centre's Director, who is also MKU Chancellor, Prof John Struthers, reveals that this is the first time for Africa to host the annual conference. UWS has hosted the previous seven editions of this event.

The theme for the 2024 CAREED international conference theme is, "Fostering Eco-



Prof John Struthers, Chancellor, MKU

nommic Transformation in African Ecosystems: Impact of Trade, Infrastructure, and Innovation".

Meanwhile, Prof Struthers lauds MKU's drive to forge new partnerships with the industry and academia. He notes that, within the last six months, the university has entered into partnerships with various organisations. One of these is the Erasmus Plus-sponsored partnership with the University of St Cy-

ril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia, in Europe. This was unveiled through the first visit of three MKU members of staff to the institution. A reciprocal visit to MKU by a team from St Cyril and Methodius is expected to take place in January 2024.

MKU has also partnered with environmental conservation organisation, Kwinta, to boost its botanic garden through mass propagation of commercially viable medicinal plants, conservation of endangered plants species, and support of the Presidential Initiative of growing of 15 billion trees between 2022 and 2032.

Talking about yet another collaboration the university has engaged in, Prof Struthers says: "The initiative towards scholarship support of the needy and bright students has also been enhanced through the new partnership with the Ugandan Based-organisation, Mercy Beyond Borders."

The MKU chancellor also noted that the university was implementing several new initiatives with a number of UK universities. The collaborations will involve promotion of SDGs, support to MKU Medical School, environmental conservation, research and capacity development.

## Faculty and students, win big from research and innovation

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Mount Kenya University (MKU) is making tremendous progress in executing its triple mandate of teaching, research and community engagement. The vice-chancellor, Prof Deogratius JAGANYI, says this is because the university is faithfully executing its strategies.

He gives the example of the success the university continues to register in research and innovation.

During an international conference organised by the United Nations Environment Programme (Unep) in Germany, MKU won a Special Impact award and a Sh830,000 grant through its researcher, Mr Donatus Njoroge.

The award ceremony took place on the side-lines of the 5th Session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5). The conference took place at the World Conference Centre (WCCB) on September 25-29, 2023.

Locally, three students – Brian Mwangoho, Wilson Muinde, and Jimmie Paul – emerged the overall winners of this year's MKU Innovation Challenge for their Smart Fingerprint Ballot Box designed to help solve matters concerning stray ballots that may arise during elections. The three students received a cash prize worth Sh100,000. The team will also travel to Ireland for Tech and Innovation Expo, early next year.

Also, a product from the university's botanical gardens – the WEMA black soap – is undergoing market validation in preparation for commercial production.

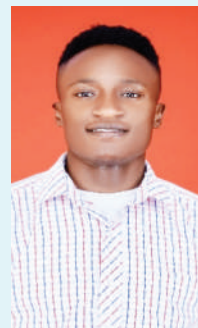
Additionally, on November 23, the university hosted its first Research, Innovation and Digital Agri-Expo 2023. The event brought together industry, academia and community to learn from each other while showcasing research outputs, innovations from faculty and students, and to promote networking among industry partners. It attracted more than 20 exhibitors, 20 researchers, and 50 innovators.

At the same time, MKU, under its ACCESS project, is piloting the Service-Learning concept with companies in Thika town. The initiative will enable postgraduate students to solve industry challenges as part of their research project. This is in addition to drawing more industry partners in scheduled consultations through the Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM).



MKU Vice-Chancellor, Prof Deogratius JAGANYI,

### Gratitude from beneficiaries of MKU Foundation



Isack Kimani, Bachelor of Science, Economics and Finance

"I extend my deepest gratitude for the school fee grant that I was awarded during my time at Mount Kenya University. I find myself reflecting on the pivotal moments and vital support systems that contributed to my academic journey, and your generous grant certainly stands out among them. I want to assure you that your investment in my education was not in vain. I am committed to using the opportunities that have been opened up to me to make a positive impact in my community and beyond. I also aim to pay forward the kindness that has been shown to me by supporting other students in the future, just as you have supported me."



Wangare Wanjiku, Bachelor of Education (Special Needs)

I am grateful for the scholarship I received from the MKU Foundation. It has made a huge difference in my educational journey. Getting the internal scholarship not once, but twice (in 2021 and 2022), was such a blessing. The scholarship came through and helped me pay my fees, allowing me to continue my studies without any financial worries.... The scholarship played a crucial role in helping me achieve my dream of getting a First Class honours. The financial support and peace of mind it provided allowed me to focus on my studies and I gave it my all.

## Where students' mental health isn't taken for granted

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Mount Kenya University (MKU) has stepped up its psychosocial support for students by providing mental health services under various programmes. According to the dean of the School of Social Sciences, Dr Serah Kimaru-Muchai, the institution organises mentorship forums in every school, and invites prominent speakers to address students. The respective schools choose the topic for the session as per the assessed needs.

At the same time, the university's counselling department in the students' welfare office is open to students who may feel they need to be heard and supported. Professional counsellors are available 24 hours a day to attend to the students facing mental health challenges.

The university also runs a facility known as Mind and Beyond Counselling Centre, at its main campus in Thika town. Students who seek services at the facility go through a 12-

day psycho-education training programme facilitated by speakers from different professional backgrounds. The aim of this training is to promote self-awareness through positive counselling, mentorship, and coaching. The facilitators are drawn from various institutions and universities.

MKU also encourages students to become peer counsellors. They are taken through a peer counselling programme and they become resourceful amongst themselves.

Additionally, the university recently launched a counselling psychology programme which has helped many students to practise the profession at an early age.

Another useful resource around mental health is the Beyond The Limit television programme that airs on TV47, at 8pm. MKU dons, Dr Jane Nyutu, the chief executive officer and founder of Mind and Beyond Counselling Centre; Dr Rahab Gathuci, clinical psychology lecturer; and Dr Kimaru-Muchai, the dean

School of Social Sciences, initiated the programme as a platform for discussing mental health and disability issues.

The trio discusses topics such as social media addiction and mental health, money and mental health, sexual disorders (masturbation), loss and grief, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Interested students tune in to the programme to learn about these issues and more.

Meanwhile, in a ceremony held on December 1, 2023 in Kigali, Rwanda, MKU won the 2023 Inclusion Disability Award in the category of Institutions of Higher Learning. The awards were organised by Thousand Hills Events in collaboration with Feed the Future Rwanda, Hanga Akazi, National Council of Persons with Disabilities, National Union of Disabilities in the Fight Against HIV and for Health Promotion, GIZ, and UNDP.

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Ms Loise Muiruri (AFRICAMO) explains the production and benefits of the WEMA Black Soap during the Research, Innovation and Digital Agri Expo 2023 hosted at Mount Kenya University, Thika, on November 23, 2023. Listening keenly are, from Left, Dr Henry Yatich, (Principal, MKU College of Graduate Studies and Research); Mr Geoffrey Monari (CEO, Universities Fund); and Dr. Ing. Calvin Nyango (Director General, KIRDI).

MKU's 24th Graduation Ceremony will air live on TV47 starting 9am.

