

Accelerating University student and teacher collaborative innovation and entrepreneurship: The new frontier for training and job creation

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In order to produce graduates of agriculture who are responsive to societal challenges, it is important to understand the causes of the most pressing societal challenges, consequences of the challenges faced and to design the necessary responses to the challenges. Limited innovative solutions and poor access to agri-food market of conventional agricultural produce has kept agriculture in the global south unsustainable, less transformed and uninteresting to the youth. Arguably, the level of knowledge and skills equipped to the graduates of agriculture neither incite innovation nor entrepreneurship and such innovative and entrepreneurial skills are also limited among the teachers at agricultural universities. A survey was therefore conducted on attitudes, knowledge and skills needs by current and potential agricultural science employers in order to assess the gaps between training, job creation and job market demands. This would then enable universities of the East African region to respond to societal challenges of food security as part of socio-economic development needs by developing accelerated approaches to learning in order to develop competent human resource. About 50% of the employers agreed that other than being generally knowledgeable in their field of training, the agricultural graduates demonstrated critical thinking, worked under minimum supervision and in teams, cared for clients and were also committed to their jobs. However, the current graduates were found to be deficient in multitasking when faced with multiple problems in the field. While the biggest proportion of employers (~40%) reported that agricultural graduates demonstrated high levels of skills in scientific writing, proposal writing and research procedures, the graduates were reported to be wanting in business management, innovativeness, entrepreneurship and organizational development. Gender disaggregated data indicated a mismatch between the current training and job market requirement at agricultural universities in Uganda. Although agricultural graduates were to a great extent perceived to be technically competent, they lacked soft skill to translate their knowledge into tangible sellable products and services. Employers argued that universities have not equipped agricultural graduates with relevant attitudes, knowledge and skills that match the job market demands to

boost agricultural production for local regional and international markets. Therefore a blend of learning approaches that incite innovation and entrepreneurship is crucial not only for students but also for university teachers to be retooled in equipping agricultural students with transferable skills. A regionally coordinated approach but internationally inspired actions including collaborative and exchange visits of students and teachers is an innovative option for hybridizing learning approaches and accelerating quality improvement of graduates from both global North and south for sustainable agricultural enterprises driven by markets.