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The significance of university-industry collaboration in developing knowledge-based economies: the SADC perspectives

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Abstract

This paper assesses the influence of university-industry collaborative efforts in developing knowledge-based economies. Due to the great persistence and demands on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the SADC region is challenged to move from being resource-based region to creating knowledge-based economies. Lack of knowledge is a major stumbling block. Based on this problem, the purpose of this study was to identify and evaluate possible university-industry collaborations that can benefit the region. The primary objective was to identify the contribution of industry in shaping the university curricula. Review of related literature indicated that SADC universities and industry are parallel segments of the economy. The literature acknowledges that the universities do a commendable job in educating nations, notwithstanding that progress and the necessity to transform knowledge are long overdue. A critical document review process was adopted as a means of collecting the required data. A purposive sample of 16 universities amongst 66 in the region was included, and a detailed analysis of their strategic plans was done. Key findings revealed that, so far there is insignificant evidence of university-industry collaborations. It was concluded that SADC is yet to utilize university-industry collaborations in developing knowledge-based economies. Therefore, it was recommended that the region must embark on robust integration of the university and industry fraternities to realize the full potential of the region.

Key Words: Knowledge-based economy, SADC, SDGs, University-industry collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

According to Ssebuwufu, Ludwick and Béland (2012) universities are regarded as a source of knowledge, innovation and technological advances. The creation of a knowledge economy depends upon the effectiveness of the universities in creating and disseminating the knowledge amongst all the economic players or stakeholders. More so the development of the economy hinges greatly on knowledge acquired and shared by the economic participants. The universities' role of being knowledge centres makes them a strategic and inseparable determinate of economic development. Ssebuwufu, et al. (2012) attest that, due to such a strategic role, there is a great transition, across the globe, in regarding the universities as strategic assets in building innovation and economic competitiveness.

The key roles of universities are to; research, teach and outreach. These basic mandates lay foundation on the duty of universities to create knowledge based economies. However, their impact is primarily affected by the level of university-industry collaboration (UIC). The general trend shows that UIC is intensified in developed than in developing countries (Sá, 2014; UNESCO, 2000; AAU, 2000, 2012; Massaquoi, 2002; Kruss, et al., 2009; The World Bank, 2009; 2010). Africa, and in particularly the SADC region, is a victim of insignificant UICs. The university-industry collaborations are a critical pillar for success and development of economies. The initiative is primarily