

Speech of Hon (Mrs.) L.D. Dookhun-Luchoomun
Minister of Education and Human Resources,
Tertiary Education and Scientific Research
Launch of Knowledge Transfer Office of the
University of Mauritius
28 April 2016

Distinguished Guests

I am greatly pleased to be present in this august gathering of today. I believe that congratulations are in order for the University of Mauritius for initiating this laudable venture of setting on rails a Knowledge Transfer Office. The University, I am happy to state, is thus following a trail blazed by many universities around the world.

If this has been done, it is certainly because of the highly beneficial spin-offs generated by collaboratively working with Industry and the community at large. One of these spin-offs is certainly the accrual of knowledge that is at the heart of societal sustainability.

Hence, I am glad to note that this knowledge Transfer Office is definitely going to be called upon to become the vehicle for networking, for access to the academic ecosystem, for creating new opportunities to learn--- but also for pitching for business funding and getting advice from established entrepreneurs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Traditionally, the transfer of knowledge has been characterized by either of two models:

One model is characteristically represented by supply-push forces where institutions of higher learning make available, transfer and sell their innovations to business concerns.

Or again, there is the demand-pull model. Here, firms commission academics to undertake research into problems that plague them, the results of which would give a fillip, an edge to them vis-à-vis their competitors.

What we are witnessing today is rather a kind of integration of both models—and that is highly positive in that many of the traditional issues at stake are overcome.

Need I spell these out?

Let me just take a couple of them.

At one time, there was a lot of being said about the seemingly irreconcilable and incompatible differences between the two worlds: businesses have needs for saleable products while Universities prize excellent research outputs and publications.

Again, Industry people have concerns, small businesses, that universities do not always find interesting enough to address.

And then you would have the IPR issue that of intellectual property rights, almost always a hot issue in academic circles, one that results in academia hitting all sorts of emotional buttons!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Academics are often criticised for not having enough contact with industries and, therefore, not being in touch with industries' talent, staff and research requirements. But at the end of the day, it remains a fact that the world of work or industry is an ultimate end-receiver of academia's internal processes of training graduates.

This condition alone should create some collaboration platform between the two stakeholders.

However, we are quite fortunate. We are fortunate in that the realization has today sunk in that, though industry-academic

collaboration can be challenging, the benefits certainly and by far can and do outweigh the risks.

Hence the importance of active collaborative ventures. I know that there exist consultative committees at the level of our public tertiary education institutions in which industry people participate for the design of university programmes. I optimistically hope and believe that the Knowledge Transfer Office will certainly bring another heightened level of collaboration between academia and industry.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been often stated that the most prosperous and advanced economies are “innovation-driven”. There is one inescapable reality for countries like Mauritius: if we aspire to escape from the middle-income trap and aim at becoming Higher Income Countries, we will have to rely enormously upon knowledge and innovation. We will need not just innovators but innovators with potential for action.

I here make a special appeal to the University researchers. Have a look at our booming SME sector and see how this sector, which is contributing a considerable share to the GDP, can be supported with specialized and applied knowledge so that it can innovate and aim at markets at the upper end.

Nor should academia forget the new domains that have been identified as economic growth poles. Government’s Vision 2030 can be fulfilled when all parties collaboratively put their shoulders to the wheel and generate and share the new knowledge that will drive growth and development.

Success, ladies and gentlemen, thus resides in university-industry linkage and industry-academia collaboration and partnership. It is this partnership that has resulted in higher education institutions increasingly creating what are referred to as spin-off companies.

Technology parks, business incubation centres and business development offices are increasingly being set up and clustered around universities and other research outfits.

Let us not get it wrong: the level of interaction with industry in various forms has become one very important measure of credibility of academic institutions.

I am, in fact, glad to announce that the forthcoming Higher Education Bill will give a special consideration to this academia-industry linkage in line with the developmental needs of Mauritius.

Let me conclude by stressing that, with knowledge having today become a most potent source of competitive advantage, the role of the University of Mauritius as an important generator of knowledge can be neither disregarded nor sidelined. This can only enhance your reputation and, once you respond to the commercialization imperative, rest assured this knowledge is set to become a major revenue stream. What you need to do then is to engage, through the Knowledge Transfer Office, into more frequent, more diverse and more effective conversations with businesses—and that for your mutual benefit.

I wish the Knowledge Transfer Office all the very best in its future ventures.

Link: http://www.uom.ac.mu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=611:knowledge-transfer-office-about-us