

The Role of Agribusiness Innovation Incubation for Africa's Development

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The global economic crisis coupled with increases in food and fuel prices and the looming impacts of climate change have necessitated that Africa should urgently rise up to these challenges and opportunities by promoting growth, food security, employment, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. A unique strategy for realizing Africa's potentials for development in the wake of these challenges is through agribusiness innovation incubation. The strategy seeks to turn the challenges into opportunities by harnessing the knowledge and information infrastructures as underlying mechanisms to encourage demand-driven research and for-profit entrepreneurship in Africa's rich agricultural sector. This paper examines the economic, social and knowledge management opportunities offered through agribusiness innovation incubation for Africa's sustainable development. This paper further provides various models and prerequisites for realizing this objective.

Keywords: Role; Agribusiness; Innovation; Incubation; Development; Africa

Introduction

Opportunities for investment in African agriculture are encouraged by a range of material and technical resources, such as the availability of land and rapidly growing markets, as well as the prospects for improving poor agricultural yields, high post-harvest losses, and ineffective food processing and marketing. Additionally, investment is encouraged by plentiful sources of skilled workers, ever increasing levels of education and technical competency, and more liquid capital than can currently be absorbed. However, large scale investment in agribusiness and agro-industry is presently constrained. Several factors seem to contribute to this current bottle-neck, including low human and institutional capacity, few entrepreneurs and problem solvers, and insufficient leadership in identifying and exploiting opportunities for investment in agriculture and agribusiness.

Agribusiness incubators are institutions which seek to turn these barriers into opportunities, to harness knowledge and information infrastructures as underlying mechanisms to encourage demand-driven research and for-profit entrepreneurship in Africa's agricultural sector. The philosophy behind agribusiness incubators is that, through their orchestrating and deliberate linkages among a range of agriculture-associated sectors, the agriculture sector will benefit from a torrent of creative and entrepreneurial energies. For that vision, incubators are called on to build smart and flexible network configurations among a broad swath

of actors including researchers, universities, farmer societies and cooperatives, technical institutes, food suppliers and product transporters, financiers, business strategists, and entrepreneurs. Incubators achieve their social purpose, which is to increase the wealth of their community, by serving businesses and companies to become more competitive in the global economy. By creating a favourable climate for innovation through linkages at several tiers of business and policy, incubators allow their industries and companies to become stronger, to make more profits, increase economic efficiency, reduce waste and environmental degradation, and to generate more employment. It is by these measures that incubators must be evaluated. This is a task that undoubtedly calls for open-minded experimentation, knowledge sharing, and continuing debate through Africa's agriculture sector.

What is an agribusiness innovation incubator?

In today's global economy, the keys to economic success are technology, research and development, knowledge management, and most of all innovation. Of course, one of the pillars in which innovation is based is research, and a large portion of the research potential of a region or country is to be found in universities and tertiary educational institutions. Incubators are the bridge between universities, research and companies. They are the 'translators' of the often-different language and different interests of the academics and the entrepreneurs (Monkman, 2010). In the

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Table 1. Overview of models of business incubation

Programme type	Context and features	Strengths	Challenges
Mixed portfolio business incubation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Target high-growth firms in a range of sectors * May select sectors that align with overall regional or national competitiveness strategy * May exist in environments where there is little entrepreneurial activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Can align with regional and national strategies, germinate new areas of competitive capacity and provide a locus for innovation * In environments where there is little entrepreneurial activity, may include extensive 'pre-incubation' and education activities to source entrepreneurs and businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * If new competitive sectors are under development, time to achieve impact and scale may be long * Where there is little entrepreneurship, attracting clients with high growth potential can be a challenge and may not be possible to operate at the scale necessary to support the incubator's business model
Technology business incubation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Targets high-growth technology firms * Requires foundation of strong technology and human capital infrastructure * If infrastructure and human capital are weak, may require extensive pre-incubation activities * May exist in economies in transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Can be an economic resource by attracting and developing research, skills and businesses * Can develop technology as a new source of competitive capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * May be challenged to scale businesses beyond seed stage because of lack of financing and difficulties entering international markets
Business incubation with university relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * University or academic institution often has a role as founder and is a source of resources such as research, expertise, space and/or funds * Typically targets technology firms, but may work with other sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Can bridge the gap between research and commercialization or technology transfer * Access to intellectual property and the potential to develop competitive businesses from it * Often provides financial stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Cultural differences if academics are seen as good researchers but poor business people or if the university is viewed as too bureaucratic and risk averse
Agribusiness incubation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Targets agricultural firms * Aims to commercialize innovative practices or transform firms from slow-growth to quick growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Can have significant economic and social impact by improving the livelihoods of communities * Can focus on agritechology and/or commercialization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Requires both business and community development skills * May be challenging to enter markets beyond local communities
Social business incubation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Uses entrepreneurship and innovation as a mechanism for social impact * Engages entrepreneurs who may be disenfranchised or where illegal economies thrive * May focus on socially valuable products and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Can be a vehicle for economic impact and social change for individuals, families and communities * Effective models and methods evolving rapidly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * May require significant investment in human capital and 'pre-incubation' activities with no assurance that early-stage business incubation can begin * Ripple effects of social impacts can be difficult to measure
Technology parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Designed to accelerate growth of relatively mature businesses * Focus on a range of technology firms, but may target specific industries * May use incubation as way to source future clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Recognized by public and private sectors as a source of economic impact * Can be a focal point for innovation and entrepreneurship, attracting talent, ideas and financial resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Discipline required to focus on growth businesses, so critical mass to make business model viable may not be possible * Where businesses are maturing, it may be difficult to demonstrate value of incubation beyond provision of cost-effective space and infrastructure
Associations and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Target incubation organizations for membership and collective activities * May advocate for entrepreneurship and innovation, especially in economies where this is not prevalent * Often have a significant role in learning and training and providing networks for members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Can be influencers in including the SME sector in national and regional competitive strategies * Can be important for capacity development for both incubators and their clients and with other stakeholders such as policymakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * In some cases, difficulty attracting resources to scale

Source: Adapted from Wambugu, 2010.

last 30 years or so, incubators have spread all over the world, and many different models have appeared, especially in the Americas, Europe and Asia (Table 1). These models, including differences and types, must be studied and understood before embarking on developing the appropriate model for Africa. Incubators stimulate and manage the flow of knowledge and technology amongst universities, research and development institutions, companies and markets; they facilitate the creation and growth of innovation-based companies through incubation and spin-off processes; and provide other value-added services together with high quality space and facilities.

An example of a successful incubator from a developed country is the University City Science Centre in Philadelphia which is owned by a consortium of more than 30 academic and scientific institutions (<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?p=66196537>). It is physically located adjacent to both the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University. Established in 1963, it is both the oldest and largest urban research park in the USA. More than 200 technology and research-based organizations are located within the science centre, and approximately 7,000 people are employed there. The centre was the world's first business incubator, and has also been the most successful – it has launched approximately 250 private sector companies during the past three decades.

Another successful incubator from a developing country is in China. In China, the Zhongguancun Science and Technology Park is the first state-level high-technology development zone. There are many research institutions and universities within its borders, including Beijing University, Tsinghua University, and institutes of the Chinese Academy of Science. Also, around one third of the members of both the Chinese Academy of Science and the Chinese Academy of Engineering can be found within the Science and Technology Park. The Science and Technology Park has five zones which house not only Chinese enterprises, but also local subsidiaries of internationally recognized firms such as IBM, Microsoft and Mitsubishi. In the Tenth Five-year Plan period (2001–2005), several major construction projects were launched, including software, biotechnology/medicine, telecommunications and other high technology industries.

Both of these parks have developed and implemented a series of policies designed to provide assistance to fledgling enterprises and organizations, thereby laying an important foundation for establishing world-class science/technology entities. Such an approach could prove very useful in promoting much-needed new and emerging technologies for sustainable development, particularly for meeting needs in developing countries. Africa must emulate these initiatives if it is to create jobs for its numerous unemployed graduates and support sustainable development.

Agribusiness incubators refer to those incubators focused on the cluster of activities attached to agribusiness. Agribusiness is best understood as a generic term for the various businesses involved in food production, including farming and contract farming, seed supply, agrochemicals, farm machinery, wholesale and distribution, processing, marketing, and retail sales. Within the agriculture industry, agribusiness is widely used simply as a convenient blend of agriculture and business, referring to the range of activities and disciplines encompassed by modern food production (Wambugu, 2010). Incubation takes place when technical knowledge, such as that derived from the research institutions or universities, is combined with social knowledge relevant to problems and social demands. Together, these forms of knowledge generate a demand driven innovation, which may later be commercialized (Kwesiga, 2010).

Design and Implementation

Consider the known challenges facing small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries, which include limited managerial capability, absence of mentoring and entrepreneurial networks, lack of business and market information, limited access to capital, poor access to markets, poor or declining infrastructure, high cost of machinery, unstable intellectual property rights (IPRs) regimes, and lack of business infrastructure. Agribusiness incubators play varied and flexible roles to confront these challenges, encourage SMEs and make targeted improvements among the research-business nexus. Varying in many ways in relation to the context and the particulars of the business sector, incubators are generally concerned with building institutional mechanisms, through partnerships and collaborations, which afford researchers and entrepreneurs with linkages and channels to have their ideas nurtured and their intellectual property protected. The priorities and strategic operations of an incubator will depend on the ecosystem of institutions in which it finds itself. Of particular significance for any incubator project will be the levels of public funding for research, availability of funding for start-ups, infrastructure for collaborative work between researchers and early stage entrepreneurs, and availability of business and management advice. An incubator is established in order to encourage, and bring into balance, these foundational ingredients in such a way as to encourage the development of small and medium sized agricultural businesses. Effective incubators have often been characterized as those which achieve integration into the larger community where activities are part of the overall community economic development plan; have an effective team, where professional management receives adequate pay and a network of business advisors, mentors and consultants are engaged; and have financial sustainability, where effectiveness and impact are measured regularly.

Incubation takes clients through a process from developing preliminary ideas, concepts and plans (pre-incubation) to developing the business (incubation) and finally leaving the incubation programme as robust firms (exit or graduation). It is vital that proposals from prospective clients are assessed and only those that will benefit from and meet the objectives of the business incubation environment and its stakeholders are selected. Business incubation is about 'hands-on support' not 'life support' and so the overriding aim should be to move clients to a point where they are no longer dependent on the services of the business incubation environments or when business incubation can no longer help them. This can be achieved by helping the clients design innovative and competitive business models that encompass all stakeholders and pay particular attention to the perspectives of the end user or customer (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). As with selection, the exit terms and strategy should fit the business incubation environment's objectives, as well as taking into consideration the type and profile of clients being supported. Whilst it is important to operate a clearly defined exit strategy, a degree of flexibility is essential as businesses will not all grow at the same rate. In order to create an organic and effective liaison, business incubation often combines shallow and broad services with narrow and deep services. In environments where a strong entrepreneurial culture does not exist, virtual business incubation may be a critical part of the service mix, to reach as many people as possible. Furthermore, when geography and isolation impede movement and transport, for instance many diverse and small islands, virtual business incubation may be the most cost effective manner in which to deliver many services.

Innovation follows different paths in different sectors. Growing sectors innovate in different ways, with a great deal of variety in methods, approaches, and results. In some industrial arenas, innovation takes the form primarily of new company formation; in others, it manifests through the activities of already existing large companies; in still others, innovation is developed externally by not-for-profit entities and adopted by individual market participants. Innovation in certain sectors is primarily product focused; in others it is process focused. It is science-based in some sectors; in others, market focused. Only by developing deep insight into the actual processes through which innovation occurs in priority sectors can a government policy hope to devote its resources to activities that will build a basis for sustainable innovation and productivity advance (Wambugu, 2010).

Linkages Required for Agribusiness Innovation Incubation to Thrive

For a business incubation to thrive links are required with the universities and research centres, as well as the

private sector and the political class (Ozor, 2010). It is only through these linkages, as illustrated in Figure 1 and elaborated below, that the holistic mandate of the incubator can be realized.

University/research

Incubators must establish partnerships with universities and research organizations. The incubator must try and orient these institutions towards supporting the development and sustenance of SMEs, which depend entirely on technology transfer, skills development, capacity building, consultation and idea exchange, symposia and industrial visits. SMEs are enterprises that provide a new product or service, or develop methods, procedures, or technologies to produce or deliver existing services more optimally (with lower costs, better quality, improved environment, etc.).

University/research partnerships present several practical opportunities for business generation. Universities are home to extensive amounts of expertise and research, technical and laboratory facilities, and large populations of potential consumers. However, systemic disjoints between business and university/research endure, and the incubator must strive to encourage functionality. That means aligning the university curriculum with the demands and priorities of business, as well as encouraging uptake of university research by the private sector. Researchers and universities are generally not equipped to respond to the demands of agribusiness and agro-industry in Africa. The cost of research collaboration is prohibitively high, and also few innovations are diffused from universities to industry. Furthermore, university graduates are often not ready for industry placement, and require expensive job training if they get there. University ought to be a place where students learn the problems and the private sector where they create solutions. While the ideals captured by this delineation may sound overly simplified, the incubator must strive to make this into a dynamic reality.

Private sector

The private sector has a crucial role in facilitating the mandates of agribusiness incubators, most crucially in the areas of financing, intellectual property regimes, and business support and management. Finance for young burgeoning businesses is a challenge across the globe, especially at the seed and market development stages. The extent of the finance gaps vary from region to region and involve both supply and demand issues. Regional approaches may be required and incubators may need to reach out to larger economies, international donors and Diasporas to find and develop appropriate financing mechanisms. Banks are widely perceived as risk averse and there is

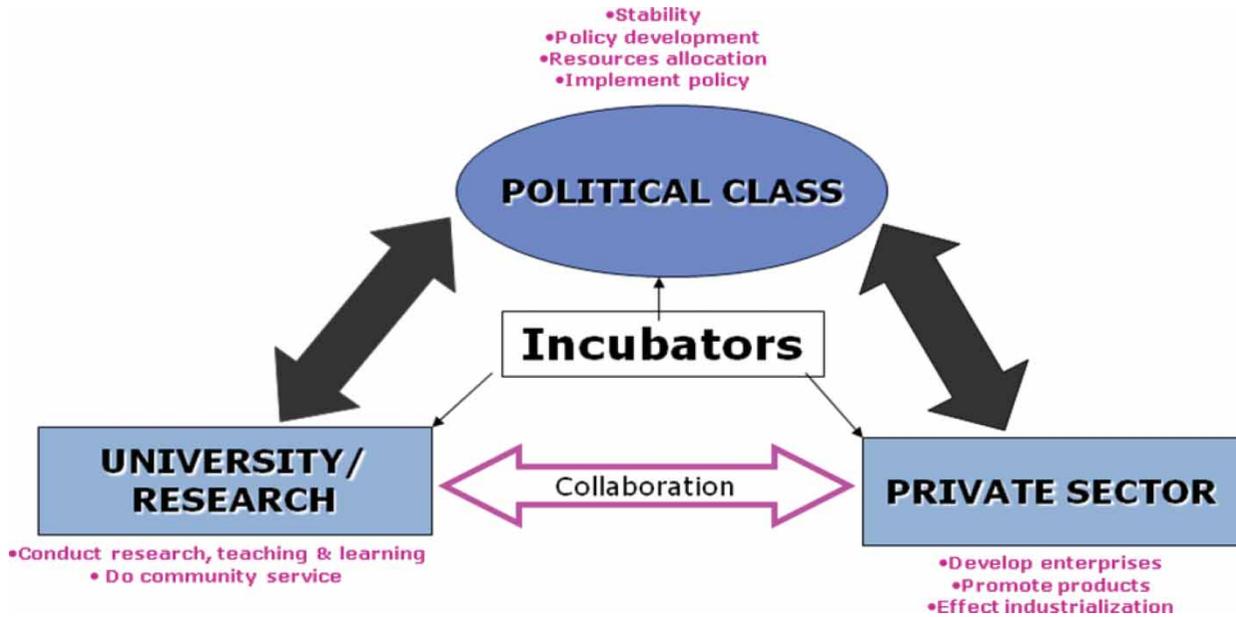


Figure 1. Incubator linkages.
 Source: Adapted from Kwesiga, 2010.

often little or no venture capital or ‘angel’ investment available.

Business incubators must strive to establish working relationships with financial institutions, such as venture capitalists, seed funders, and microfinance banks. These linkages enable the incubator to incentivize innovation through lowering the cost and risk of borrowing. Kenya’s Industrial and Commercial Development Corporation (ICDC) for instance is a wholly owned government development finance institution. Since 1954, in partnership with both local and foreign private sectors, ICDC has played a leading role as a provider of investment capital to various industrial and commercial setups in the country (Olenkiti, 2010). It provides a valuable example of the type of financial ingenuity which incubators must strive to utilize. ICDC, like other development financial institutions (DFIs) was established to address *inter alia*, market failures caused by unstable macroeconomic environments as well as to provide access to financial services in areas where the commercial banks were risk averse. To meet these expectations, the corporation’s main product offering for many years was, therefore, provision of venture capital and medium and long term loans.

Legal and regulatory frameworks must lead the way in incubator design, and private sector actors are often well experienced in these matters, as they have an operational sense of IPR climates. Intellectual property management is the thread that runs through the innovation process, and the glue that holds entrepreneurial partnerships together. Scientific innovation can and must support economic growth and the development of sustainable agriculture, but innovation needs a supportive environment in

which to thrive. IPR protection plays a key role in creating that environment. Research shows that IPRs play a dynamic role among the research, private, and public sectors. Importantly, they shape facilitation of technological learning, creation of technology flows, transfers of foreign technologies, domestic diffusion of foreign technologies, and indigenous R&D efforts to innovate (Okunzi, 2010).

Business support, using formal and informal mechanisms, is a key element of the business incubation process. There is currently a growing understanding and provision of generic business support, often using Business Development Service (BDS) principles, both within the public and private sectors. Any business incubation builds on this generic support with intensive and specialized support programmes for growth oriented firms. To provide a comprehensive array of business support services and networks, incubators need to develop relationships with specialized service providers regionally and internationally to fill any local gaps. The usual set of services include access to office and communication services at pay as you use rates (including internet, telephone, photocopying, fax, binding, reception, mail and document receipt and dispatch secretarial services); business development programmes (by way of training, face to face advice, formal and informal reviews, using management staff, mentors and networks of business service providers to help clients learn and adopt good management practices); business planning; financial, marketing, human resources and IPR management; strategic planning; and assistance in securing private and public finance for the business.

A business incubator can help its clients navigate regulatory environments, which can be invaluable for clients, reducing their compliance costs and the time involved. Small businesses often do not have the resources or the contacts to navigate sometimes very difficult regulatory environments. A business incubator, with good networks, credibility and links, can not only advise its clients but can also play an important role in raising specific issues with policy makers that are particularly problematic for entrepreneurs.

Political class

Political support is always valuable for ventures, especially those which benefit from policy level support made possible by private–public partnerships. Politics can be said to be superior to science in the sense that the political class and policy makers determine the science agenda and research and development priorities in any country. They decide how much and which sector will be supported or given priority attention to. It is therefore necessary that scientists and development agencies endeavour to win the support of the political class and policy makers who may not have the patience for theories and models but on practical realities of interest to them and the society they serve (at times). This can be achieved through policy dialogues, roundtables and sensitization workshops, among others. The Ugandan Industrial Research Institute (UIRI) provides an important example for the merits of political support. UIRI is a government research organization which sought to scale up its incubator services, but had been heavily strained for resources. These challenges have been overcome, in part, through garnering political support. The UIRI incubator was fortunate to have been visited by the President of Uganda. The Director achieved this feat by showcasing numerous tangible products, processes and services that have been developed by the incubator to the President. Ever since then, the President and his team have continued to support the institute with financial and material resources. UIRI has also managed to form effective collaborations with universities, industries, technical and tertiary institutions, and other research institutions both in Uganda and in the East African sub region.

The Role of Agribusiness Innovation Incubators

Business Incubation is a tool that clearly enables five key areas of action identified in the World Bank Group Agriculture Action Plan for 2010–2012. These areas include: raised agricultural productivity; linking farmers to market and strengthening value addition; reducing risk and vulnerability; facilitating agricultural entry, exit and rural nonfarm income; and enhancing environmental services and sustainability (Cooperhouse, 2010). Incubators serve as industry aggregators, cluster creators and hubs for knowledge

transfer through a prudent approach to engaging with local and national federal agencies, industry, farmer co-operatives, food startups, regional research, university, and knowledge centres, and also sector-specific incubators worldwide. Through their programmes, incubators serve three distinct, albeit inter-related roles in terms of economic impact, social impact, and knowledge management.

Economic role

In today's global economy it is only through innovation that companies can ensure their progress and their place in the market and can become strong enough to survive. In 2005 alone, North American incubators helped more than 27,000 start-up companies that provided full-time employment for more than 100,000 workers and generated annual revenues of more than \$17 billion (Monkman, 2010). There is an association between an increase in the number of successful small enterprises and the wealth of a nation, defined as decreased poverty and increased employment opportunities (Amadi, 2010). Although the USA is a rich country overall, business incubation is used to grow jobs in areas or sectors that need development. Some facts about the American experiences reveal the tremendous economic potential afforded by incubators. For every \$1 of public investment in an incubator, local tax revenues of \$30 were created. About 84% of graduated companies stayed in the community they started in. Also, 87% of incubator graduates stayed in business. In the US, 'cluster incubators' that focus on a sector such as agribusiness, construction, or energy are growing (Monkman, 2010).

More and more, environmentally sustainable agribusinesses are being seen as an indirect effect of incubators. Incubators inhabit a position uniquely suited to reducing economic waste and improving environmental sustainability. Through their local perspective and collaborations with farmer cooperatives and local entrepreneurs, incubators and their larger networks are able to recognize and respond to micro-level phenomenon such as instances of environmental waste and degradation. It is these mechanisms that are vital for creating sustainable agricultural businesses. For instance, an agribusiness incubator in Uganda converts banana peels and wastes into bio-gas, useable papers, clothes and trinkets. While this is just one example of successful business incubation, it points towards something fundamental and important about incubators and their ability to confront environmental waste and degradation and convert it into useful products, processes and services.

Social role

Incubators achieve their social purpose, which is to increase the wealth of their community, by serving businesses and helping companies to become more competitive in the

global economy. By creating a favourable climate for innovation through linkages at several tiers of business and policy, incubators allow their industries and companies to become stronger, to make more profits and to generate more employment. By doing so, they realize their most important objective in economic and industrial policy: to increase the social welfare and improve the standard of living of their citizens. In other words, they aim to build better life conditions and social fairness. It is indeed important to realize that by helping the businesses in the ways described above, incubators are also very significantly helping the universities to increase their own competitiveness, to better fulfil the new roles that today's society demands of them: namely to be active agents of economic development, and last but not least to increase their income via research contracts with the industry.

Knowledge management

As a result of low technology use for agriculture in Africa, productivity is extremely low, and far below productivity in other regions of the world. Post-harvest handling systems are underdeveloped and post-harvest losses are high (up to 25–30%). Most African countries have had agricultural colleges, university faculties and research institutes for decades. These institutions are actively engaged in research and have been credited with producing several innovations including new crop varieties, fertility management technologies, and processing protocols. The utilization of these research outputs, however, remains low. To enhance technology transfer and increase the contribution of universities and research institutes to agricultural development, there is the need for universities and research institutes to establish structures and mechanisms for the transfer and development of technologies that will continually feed the industries. The agribusiness innovation incubation programme constitutes one such mechanism. Technology and business incubation, which entails the nurturing of start-ups by providing technical support, access to facilities, training, access to networks and services, in order to improve enterprise survival, is proven for engaging universities and research organizations in enterprise development (Muyonga, 2010). Incubation is particularly helpful in the commercialization of new technologies because it promotes cooperative work between researchers and enterprises in a mutually beneficial environment. This relationship serves a dual purpose, not only does it ensure that technologies are refined to the satisfaction of the technology users, but it also provides an opportunity for the users to master the developed technology.

Today, a combination of poor management and stunted vision plague the university-research-industry nexus. Innovation systems fail to harness the collective knowledge embodied in thousands of dissertations and senior projects completed by African graduates. Also, very few people

who are trained in agribusiness actually start businesses due to unfavourable economic, environmental and social factors. Amazingly, about 80% of small and medium agricultural enterprises (SMAEs) are owned by people who were not trained in agriculture or agribusiness at the tertiary level. It is high time agricultural graduates begin to reverse this trend by engaging in agribusiness incubation programmes in order to gain support for establishing their own businesses. In this way, more people would be interested in reading agriculture as a course in tertiary institutions and more jobs would be made available to people and other graduates. However, the curriculum of tertiary institutions needs to change to accommodate issues of agribusiness and innovation incubation as a prerequisite for achieving development targets in this sector in Africa.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Incubators must play a significant role in the development of Africa's agriculture sector. To expedite that process, pan-African incubation initiatives must be revived, and research programmes must investigate innovation systems in order to precisely locate incubators among the agricultural sector clusters. This will not only rely on political support at the highest levels, but will also be enabled by a few simple prescriptions, which may include requiring or encouraging recipients of government research to form collaborative agreements with incubators that operate within their region; ensuring that appropriate services and space are available for incubator graduates and other second-stage companies in all communities where incubation programmes operate; widening the scope of government funding programmes to support incubators; ensuring that incubators follow best practices; standardizing outcome measures across the agribusiness incubation industry; tailoring new incubators to the needs of local communities rather than applied as a bureaucratic solution from above; and improving local, regional and national support for seed, angel and venture capital funding.

The African Incubator Network, a consortium buttressed by *infoDev*, may act as a clearing house for best practices, but it requires funding to revive it. Also, innovative efforts such as the Universities, Research and Business in Agricultural Innovation (UniBRAIN) should provide a vision for the years ahead. UniBRAIN is a facility for linking university education, research and business in sustainable agriculture aimed at: developing agricultural business innovations in a conducive institutional setting which links universities, incubates, research institutions and private sectors in an Agribusiness Innovation Incubator Consortia (AIIC) environment; producing agribusiness entrepreneurs and innovators by improving BSc and MSc agribusiness teaching and training; and sharing and up-scaling innovation outputs, experiences and practices through improved networking and channels of communication.

UniBRAIN is a pan-African initiative of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) in partnership with the African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS), African Network for Agriculture, Agroforestry and Natural Resources Education (ANAFE), and the Pan African Agribusiness and Agro Industry Consortium (PanAAC) and is being supported by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Danida). UniBRAIN is addressing one of the five core initiatives identified through 15 comprehensive consultations held by the Africa Commission in 2008, which found that, 'African universities are not sufficiently geared to meet the needs of industry' (Africa Commission, 2009). Graduates often cannot find employment, while many small businesses lack staff with the education and skills needed to drive innovation. Essentially, the relationship between the demands of the private sector and what universities teach is too weak. In order to realize the potential for investment in African agriculture, UniBRAIN is pioneering a new approach to promoting agricultural innovation and improving tertiary agribusiness education in Africa. UniBRAIN will step away from the mainstream to bring African universities into agricultural innovation through increased and strengthened collaboration between universities, research institutions and the private sector, farmer organizations, agricultural extension services, improved teaching and learning and knowledge sharing. These collaborations are being arranged with a goal to create cultures and environments that will value, encourage and enable innovation as well as produce graduates who are problem solvers, decision takers and successful entrepreneurs. UniBRAIN promotes innovation by supporting the start-up, diversification and up-scaling of commercial ventures, supports graduate training in entrepreneurial and business skills and advances graduate research-based knowledge that is relevant to the development of African agriculture and agribusinesses.

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