MULUNGUSHI UNIVERSITY

REPORT ON THE INNOVATIONS FAIR THAT TOOK PLACE ON TUESDAY 6th May, 2025 AT CHALABESA HALL, MULUNGUSHI UNIVERSITY

Introduction

On Tuesday 6th May, Mulungushi University held, its Inaugural Innovation Fair under the theme: *"Enhancing Business Resilience Through Innovation and Trade."* Set to be an annual fair, the event is a flagship initiative of the University, through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) aimed at fostering a culture of innovation, problem - solving, entrepreneurship, and applied research among students and staff. It provides a dynamic platform for students and staff (as mentors) from various academic disciplines to present novel ideas, showcase their prototypes, and engage in meaningful dialogue with industry leaders, policymakers, researchers, and fellow innovators.

Through, the awarding of monetary prizes (K50,000, K30,000, K20,000, K10,000) the fair aimed at encouraging participation and excellence. More importantly, by engaging with industry and the community during the fair, the university demonstrated its desire to see how these projects can be turned into start-up ventures and eventually patented, bridging the gap between academia and industry. Hence, recognizing and rewarding innovation not only benefits individual winners but also elevates the university's standing as a hub of research and innovation. It showcases Mulungushi University as an institution that values and invests in innovation, attracting potential partners, funders, and prospective students.

In Attendance

Vice Chancellor, Mulungushi University

82 registered Mulungushi University Members of Staff and students (excluding walk ins)

52 Exhibitors

2 representatives from PACCRA

2 representatives from Provincial Administration

1 Lecturer from Kabwe Institute of Technology

Director Research and Postgraduate Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University

1 Community Representative

Proprietor, Farmer's Nest Group of companies

Participants/Exhibitors

The innovation Fair had a total of 47 projects distributed across six schools as follows: 2 from School of Social Sciences; 2 from School of Agriculture and Natural Resources; 3 from School of Natural and Applied Sciences; 8 from School of Medicine and Health Sciences and 32 from School of Engineering and Technology.

Five adjudicators were initially invited and these comprised of 2 representatives from academia (Nkrumah and KIT), 1 representative from the community (Mr. Chali Musonda, Luanshimba); 1 representative from the Kabwe Chamber of Commerce (Mr. Kapayi Banda) and 1 representative from industry/start up (Mr. Matthew Mohan). When one adjudicator, Mr. Kapayi Banda did not show up, the committee resorted to using the remaining four judges.

2 Representatives from PACCRA had also been invited to lead a panel discussion on 'Turning Ideas into Start Ups,' and 'Intellectual Property and Innovation Rights." Owing to the inadequacy of time during the innovation fair for the planned discussion, one of the PACCRA representatives ended up sharing the industry representative judging slot with Mr. Mohan.

Preparation for the Innovation Show

Preparations for the innovation fair officially started when Deputy Vice Chancellor Research and Innovations handed over the mandate of hosting the fair to the Shows and Exhibitions committee in March, 2025. A memo was then sent out to schools on 31st of March informing them that the call for projects for the trade fair that had been sent out on the 15th of February would now apply to the planned innovation Fair. In the memo, the committee indicated the various parameters that would be used to assess projects and award the top 4 innovations in monetary form. In addition, school representatives on the committee were tasked to work closely with the schools to ensure that projects were developed and registered to the committee by 13th April, 2025. The committee held follow up meetings after this for updates, task delegation e.t.c

By midday Monday 5th May, 2025 banners had been hoisted at the main entrance and Flag post/ main administration block announcing the event. Prior to this, the University populace had been informed of the Fair via memo to staff and students and also the University website and social media platforms. Physical preparations of the venue and assembling of projects began in the afternoon of Monday, 5th May, having suspended classes in Chalabesa hall. Preparation of the venue continued on the material day of the fair, 6th May and was completed by 09:00 hrs. While this was happening, the adjudicators had a brief meeting at the Vice Chancellor's boardroom for debriefing and familiarisation with adjudication guidelines provided (see attached).

Proceedings of the Innovation Fair

The programme officially opened at 10:00hrs with welcoming remarks from the events coordinator, Dr. Mwaka Siluonde. This was followed by the national anthem and an opening prayer by Dr. Sinyinda Muwanei. After this the Vice Chancellor, called upon by Director Postgraduate Studies, Dr. Meki-Kombe, gave his opening speech followed by the keynote speech from Mr. Matthew Mohan. The latter emphasised the need for innovators to consider the 4 C's - Competition, Consumer, Control and Consistency for their innovations to be successful and sustainable. The opening ceremony ended with a 30-minute health break at 11:00.

Adjudication started at 11:30 hours and ended at 18:30 hrs with a one-hour break for lunch in between. Each exhibitor was given 5 minutes within which to pitch their innovation to the adjudicators, followed by a 5-minute (give or take) question session from judges. Exhibitions were judged based on originality and creativity (20); feasibility and practicability (15); Impact and relevance (20); sustainability (10); marketability and business potential (15); technical soundness and scientific merit (10); Presentation and demonstration (10) adding to a total of 100 marks. As a result of the lengthy adjudication, the PACCRA led discussion did not take place as planned. Results of the innovation fair could only be compiled, verified and announced outside the actual show i.e by 16th May, 2025

Successes

The Innovation Fair was successful in the following ways:

- The fair was able to attract exhibitions (47) from all schools except School of Business Studies;
- The Presence of the Vice Chancellor lent a sense of importance to the event and demonstrated the value that the University accords to Innovations;
- The fair was well advertised to the students and university populace through the shows and exhibitions committee, student led initiatives and coverage by School of Business Media;
- The fair was well organised with regards to banners, food/refreshments, actual physical venue i.e display and arrangement of projects;
- The fair had a diverse composition of judges from academia, industry, the community e.t.c
- The fair was able to stir the interest of stakeholders/ outsiders such as PACCRA officials, Provincial Administration officers and one Entrepreneur/ Motivational speaker Dumisani Ncube.

Challenges

Time Keeping: This was generally a challenge i.e it was not easy to hurry VC's entourage/visitors whose presence was required for the event to start. Hence the event started at 10:00 instead of 09:00; during adjudication, it was not easy to restrict questions from judges.

As a result, the PACCRA led discussion set for the afternoon could not be done. Similarly results could not be compiled, verified and announced the same day as planned.

Quality of Projects: From the judge's observations some student's seemed not to understand the concept of an innovation and ended up presenting projects that were still at the investigative stage and in some cases theoretical ideas as would be the case in a lecturer's class exposition.

Recommendations

- The following are some of some of the recommendations raised by the organising committee in relation to the challenges faced during the inaugural innovation Fair:
- More time i.e more than one day to be allocated to the Innovation Fair so as to accommodate adjudication, scoring/totalling and other activities;
- The University should identify companies (e.g Trade Kings, Farmer's Nest e.t.c) as potential sponsors of innovation fair awards while the University focuses on other logistics;
- The University to consider renumeration of mentors, organising committee members and all exhibitors (for participation);
- Organise and award projects based on categories e.g agriculture, engineering, technology, medicine, social sciences e.t.c
- The Committee to View and verify projects from schools before the actual innovation fair for quality assurance purposes.

Conclusion

Despite some of the challenges faced during the Inaugural Innovation Fair, the event was generally a success as evidenced by the many favourable reviews received from members of the University and other stakeholders. It is hoped that with the recommendations raised, next year's Fair will attract more students, members of staff and stakeholders outside the University.

Compiled by : Mwaka Siluonde PhD (Shows and Exhibitions Committee Chairperson)

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