

**Report of the
1st EAC Regional Youth Innovation Forum with innovation awards
8th – 10th November 2022 in Kampala, Uganda.
Organized by EASTECO**



1.0 Preamble

1.1 General

The East African Science and Technology Commission (EASTECO) organized the first Youth Innovation Forum from 8th to 10th November 2022 in Kampala, Uganda which culminated in Presidential Innovation Awards for six best youth from the Eastern Africa Region. The Forum was organised by EASTECO in collaboration with Ministry of East African Community Affairs, Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Uganda National Council of Science and Technology and other stakeholders. The theme of the Forum was “Unlocking Youth Development potential through Innovations”.

1.2 Objectives

The objective of the East African Youth Innovation Forum was to identify and support relevant youth innovations regionally and to build capacity in entrepreneurship skills that addresses socio-economic challenges in the EAC region. The Forum sought to: Identify and support talented youth innovators in developing scientific and technological solutions for societal needs; provide innovative space for nurturing talent and accelerating start-ups; provide entrepreneurship skills for youth creativity and job creation through capacity building; create a platform (web-portal) for interlinking an ecosystem of young innovators with industry, academia and the private sector; establish a Presidential Innovation Awards scheme for the youth

with outstanding innovations; and avail a forum for highlighting success stories of home-grown innovations, best practice, methods and concepts.

1.3 Rationale

According to the East African Community, in 2014, up to 34 per cent of the total population of five of the EAC partner states (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda) was between 15 and 34 years of age, which is the active youth bracket. In 2016, South Sudan joined the Community, bringing the population of the region to 158 million. With an overall population growth of around 2.9 per cent and the progress of the national education systems within the EAC region, the youth population is not only growing but it is also getting better education. If this human capital is channelled toward productive and innovative sectors of the economy, the youth population will offer tremendous opportunities as a major instrument for the social and economic development of the EAC Partner States and for a high competitiveness on the global market. However, failing to prepare and to harness the youth population as businessmen and worker transformation leaders would lead to significant threats to social and community cohesion as well as political and governmental stability. This, in turn, would significantly affect the regional integration agenda.

Therefore, EASTECO, being the lead institution for the EAC in developing and promoting technological innovation within partner states, has a critical role in ensuring that the region's talented youth are promoted and become performing actors and future leaders for the industrial and enterprise sectors. In this regard, the Youth Innovation Forum was hosted to offer a platform to catalyse the effective engagement of young people in steering the course of future developments within the EAC.

2.0 Key observations during the Forum

2.1 Overview

The Forum offered a platform to catalyse the effective engagement of young people in steering the course of future developments within the East African Community (EAC) through innovations. It further brought together young researchers, developers and innovators, entrepreneurs, finance actors, academia and public policy makers to discuss the regional situation and latest trends in research and development as well as innovation and product development.

The Forum enabled participants and EASTECO stakeholders to understand the challenges that the youth in the region face in advancing their talent in technological development, in addition to the opportunities available for innovation in the regional marketplace and globally.

2.1 Presidential Awards

The Youth Innovation Forum culminated in presidential awards that recognized outstanding applications developed by East African youth as well as outstanding youth innovators capable of

stimulating the local innovation eco-system. The selection process involved advertising the Youth innovation programme in the media in each partner state and on EAC and EASTECO website calling for application submissions online from eligible young innovators (in two categories 12-18 years of age and 18-35 years of age) in the 10 priority themes/categories (Agriculture, Health, Education, Climate Change and Environment , ICT mobile applications, Energy and Infrastructure, Industrialization and Trade, Aeronautics and Space Technology, Financial Services, Media and Entertainment). The National Steering Committee chaired by National Council of Science and Technology in each partner state was then constituted to appoint a national panel of experts to evaluate the best innovators in their respective countries.

Innovations Award Criteria encompassed assessment on;

(i) Originality

The uniqueness of the product and its superiority in comparison with similar or alternative products in the market. This includes incremental and radical innovations.

(ii) Marketability

The extent to which the innovation sufficiently addresses the problem it seeks to solve at a cost or model that is accessible to the target market and can generate profits or is self-sustainable.

Selection of Youth Innovators

(iii) Scalability

The extent to which the solution can be easily applied to other similar markets beyond the applicant's immediate or local environment.

(iv) Social Impact

The ability of the innovation to create or effect positive and desirable benefit beyond profit within the target community and other stakeholders.

(v) Technical Aspects

The technical specifications of the innovation are grounded on established science and sufficiently address anticipated product risks.

The Leading Youth Innovators were thus selected competitively from the six (6) EAC countries.

Pioneer awardees were six talented innovators from Kenya ~ ~ ~ ~

It is believed that the awards have stimulated young innovators in generating scientific and technological innovative solutions to social needs and to meet market demand. Further, the awards will facilitate a regional platform for encouraging young innovators to generate technology and business innovative solutions that are relevant to social needs and that address market demand. The Youth Innovation Forum is also expected steer youth towards creating social enterprises that aim to cure social problems through innovative practices. Overall, the Forum aims at empowering youngsters to steer their own initiatives and contribute to the building of a prosperous and independent society.

3.0 Concluding Remarks

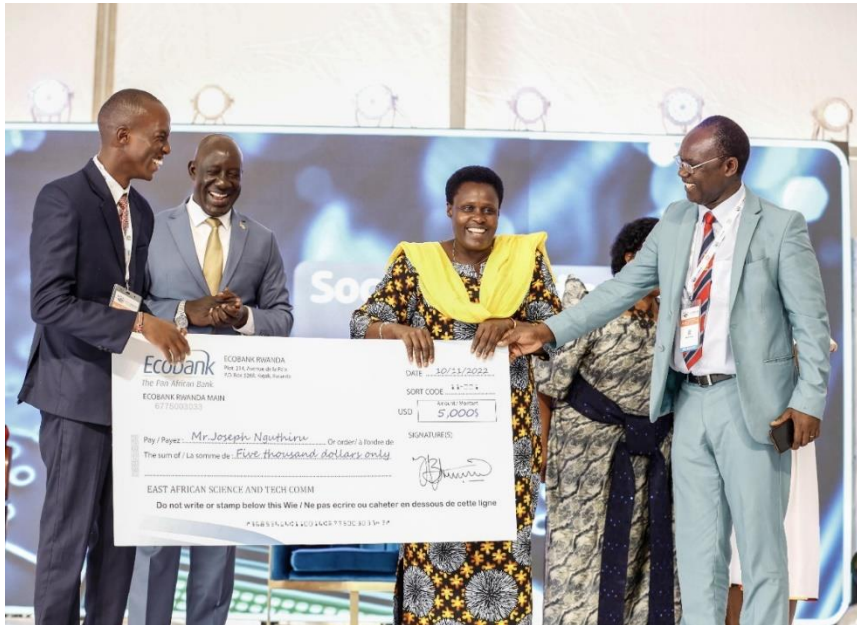
The Forum brought together Youth from the East African Region to network, engage and share experiences. Further, the Forum presented opportunity to mentor upcoming technopreneures. The Youth Innovation Forum is also expected steer youth towards creating social enterprises that aim to cure social problems through innovative practices.

The culmination of the Forum was the Presidential Innovation Awards to six (6) outstanding youth. It is believed that the awards have stimulated young innovators in generating scientific and technological innovative solutions to social needs and to meet market demand. Further, the awards will facilitate a regional platform for encouraging young innovators to generate technology and business innovative solutions that are relevant to social needs and that address market demand.

Overall, the Forum aims at empowering youngsters to steer their own initiatives and contribute to the building of a prosperous and independent society. It is anticipated that the Forum will held periodically.

ANNEX

Kenya's renowned Youth Innovator Tops in Presidential Innovation Awards in the East Africa



Presidential Innovation Awards Winner from Kenya, Mr. Joseph Nguthuri (far left) being awarded his dummy cheque by Her Excellency the Vice President of Uganda, Hon. Jessica Alupo (centre), assisted by the Chairman of EASTECO Governing Board/DG NACOSTI-Kenya, Prof. Walter Oyawa (far right). Also present were the Minister of ICT and National Guidance, Uganda, the Minister of Transport, Uganda, the Minister for Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, and the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Economic Planning.

Kenya has demonstrated its prowess and leadership on impacting innovations geared towards enhancing prosperity and livelihoods in the East Africa Region. Mr. Joseph Nguthuri, a graduate of Egerton University, was selected to be part of the the six Top Young Innovators in the East African Region following competitive selection by a pool of eminent experts established by the EASTECO (East Africa Science, and Technology Commission of the EAC). Mr. Nguthuri received his Presidential Innovation Award from His Excellency President Yoweri Museveni who was represented by Her Excellency the Vice President of Uganda, Hon. Jessisa Alupo, in the presence of EASTECO Executive Secretary, Dr. Sylvance Okoth and EASTECO Governing Board Chairman Prof. Walter Oyawa, as well as other Governing Board members of EASTECO. The Occasion was also graced three eminent Cabinet Ministers of the Uganda Government, namely the Minister of ICT and National Guidance-Uganda, the Minister of Transport=Uganda, and the Minister for Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation.

Mr. Nguthuri's innovation is likely to be a game changing global innovation as it seeks to convert or transform the troublesome water hyacinth into biodegradable alternatives for single-use plastic products. The innovation primarily converts water hyacinth (world's most problematic aquatic weed) into biodegradable alternatives for single use disposable plastic products like wrappers and plastic straws, tumblers and party plates. Plastics developed through Mr. Nguthuri's innovation biodegrade within 3 to 6 months. The Chairperson of EASTECO Governing Board, Prof. Oyawa, has commended EASTECO Management, through its Executive Secretary, Dr. Sylvance Okoth, and expressed EASTECO's determination to identify and work with young innovators in the region by providing necessary guidance and experts on innovation protection through patenting, innovation scale-up and commercialization, innovation legal framework, Innovative entrepreneurship, and innovation royalties. He further reiterated

that the innovation fits well with Kenya’s regional Leadership on climate change mitigation, and may be easily scaled-up to serve multi-purposes relating to the use of plastics.

Mr. Joseph Nguthuri’s award comes at a time when Kenya has also emerged as top with the most innovative companies in Africa (three Kenyan companies out of a total of six in Africa), as presented in the World Economic Forum, in its annual 2022 Technology Pioneers list. The World Economic Forum list includes firms employing technology and innovation to positively impact on business and society.



Photo session with all the six Presidential Innovation Award Winners, Her Excellency the Vice President of Uganda, three Cabinet Secretaries of Uganda, EASTECO Top Management, EASTECO Governing Board Chairperson and Members