

Plenary 3: Innovation from Concept to Commercialization to Internationalization

Moderator: Eduardo Costa, Director Innovation of Research and Project Financing (FINEP)

The speakers were addressing the challenges that entrepreneurs and companies face when developing international business.

Samer Al-Jabari, CEO of Focus Solution, Jordan

Samer gave the entrepreneur's point of view – FS started in 2003 in Jordan, they produced software for law firms in Jordan. At that time there were no incubators in Jordan, but the first one, I Park was created shortly afterwards that FS joined. First client base was the banking industry rather than the initially envisaged law industry.

I Park supported FS especially in the area of innovation, and solving all the legal issues around setting up a business in Jordan. The real challenge was to break into the international market, and this was achieved by developing business with international banks. Their interaction with the banks stimulated them to introduce new innovations. By engaging with the foreign banks, they slowly built up the relationships and credibility, paving the way for internationalization. "But going into the international market is tough."

FS has graduated from I Park "but the incubator still helps us" and "we need to have access to more virtual services".

"If you succeed and sustain for 1 year this is a success – and if you can succeed for 1 year you can succeed for 3, 5 and 10 years".

Serene Ho, Deputy Director Business Development of Infocomm Development Authorities International, Singapore

Singapore gained its independence in 1965 – occupies 680 sq km, population of 2 million. The population comprises largely Chinese, Malays and Indians. It has a GDP of US\$180 billion.

"You've got to start with an improbable story"...Singapore has no natural resources, and had no industry. But today it's a real success story – the journey took 30 years...."an intelligent nation, a global city, powered by InfoComm... this is the 2015 master plan".

An industry development framework has been created in order to help companies grow – it's a real pro business environment, with tax incentives, export programmes and strong IP support. (IPR – important for innovation to thrive - Singapore is a major signatory for all the international IP agreements.) This has led to the N° 1 position as the easiest place to do business – 7000 multinationals.

This basic framework is enhanced by a strategy for capacity development, from research & development to sales & marketing. A set of tools is available to all companies to help boost business including subsidy packages to get access to ICT. The wireless network is key for success...helping to create new innovations. Schools also are beneficiaries of the wireless strategy. Innovation and ICT is a strategic enabler in their economic development. Always adopt Private, Public and People sector approach.

Singapore has gone from a trading nation to an innovation driven economic power house.

“Innovation has no beginning and no end – we must continue to innovate”

Prof Simbo Boroffice, Director Planning & Liaison, Nigeria

Nigeria has a population of 140 million with oil and natural gas – natural resources. However, because of this abundance of natural resources, no attention was given to other sectors and industries.

“Globalisation” was not always seen as a positive development, as in some sectors, products were dumped into the Nigerian market and local SMEs could not survive with the force of global competition. But new programs have been developed, and this includes technology commercialisation. Under this programme emphasis is placed on technology value-addition initiatives. The government supports the incubator programme by fostering collaboration between knowledge bases and industry. A strong stakeholder network has been created to support the incubation framework. To date there are 21 Technology Innovation Centres (TIC). A total of 235 entrepreneurs and 1871 jobs have been created. The model is “multipurpose” which means that projects from all sectors are welcomed into the incubators.

The private sector traditionally did not collaborate with the public sector. Now there is a drive towards PPP strategy. Industrial Parks will be created to host graduate entrepreneurs.

Alessandro Teixeira, President Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency and World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies

Innovation is core to going international, and the role of science parks and incubators is in promoting the innovation environment to achieve this.

An example from Brazil: “Natura”. This company faced the problem of adapting products to new markets. Clients from other markets have different needs, tastes etc –you need to be able to innovate to access new global clients.

In the past, invention was the first part of the innovation process. Now it’s the other way around – you need to look at the market first.

Taking a product to the international market – this transition needs quality & standardisation, and knowledge of the systems and structures of other global markets. This is where incubators and science parks can play a key role – to help develop this capacity.

“In order to go international, innovation is not a process but a strategy”

General considerations when going international:

- Important to create international governmental bodies to help entrepreneurs export their products, with international representation and targets for these offices.i.t.o number of companies assisted in exporting.
- Nigeria has a large domestic market, hence providing extra incentives are needed to get Nigerians to think global....soft-landing zones could help.
- There is no single way – each country must develop its own assistance mechanisms.
- Need a holistic approach.