

Some business lessons from the tragic Fort Ternan bus accident

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An ambulance transports an accident victim to Kericho County Referral Hospital from Fort Ternan Sub-County Hospital on October 10, 2018. PHOTO | ONDARI OGEKA | NATION MEDIA GROUP

In Summary

- No country can develop if it does not have a vibrant private sector and an aggressive entrepreneurial class
- But no entrepreneur, big or small, should be exempted from adhering to the laws of the land.
- For any business to succeed in the long term, it should, from the very outset, be both inclusive and sustainable.

It has been several weeks since nearly 60 people perished in the tragic Fort Ternan road crash in Kericho County. As the dust settles on the tragedy and the story fades from the headlines, I hope some useful lessons are learnt by all stakeholders if only to make public transport a lot safer.

Even as investigations continue, there are a few facts that we know already that could offer useful insights into public transportation and the conduct of business in general.

OVERLOADED

We now know, for instance, that the bus driver, who had reportedly been with the firm for just a couple of days, had no co-driver, had probably done more hours than prescribed by law and had complained about the road worthiness of the bus. Reports indicate that the bus was overloaded to the extent that some passengers sat on soda crates. The bus was not licensed to operate at night yet it left Nairobi at midnight and at some point had to return to the stage to pick up more passengers.

INCOMPLETE

Concerns have also been raised about the workmanship and quality of material used to build buses with reports that some entrepreneurs go for cheap material which easily fall apart on impact. Added to these is the bad condition of that road, which has been described as “incomplete” and lacking in signage and markings. Considering this, it is safe to conclude that the accident wouldn’t have happened and 56 lives would have been saved had the entrepreneur taken a few steps to make his business safer.

EXEMPTED



No country can develop if it does not have a vibrant private sector and an aggressive entrepreneurial class to create jobs and generate revenue for the government through taxes. However, no entrepreneur, big or small, should be exempted from adhering to the laws of the land.

In the case of public transport, I hold that it is many times better to park your bus in the yard for a period as you try to get it right than to have it on the road against the law. The police may look the other way or may be overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of vehicles but when something as tragic as an accident happens, you can be sure you will bear the burden alone.

KEY PLANKS

The second lesson is that profit should never be the only driving motive for business. Sure, profit is important but it is only one of the three Ps and by itself, is not enough to keep a business in place in the long term. The second P refers to People while the third stands for Planet. These are the three key planks not just for business but for also civil society and government. I equate it to a three-legged stool. When one leg is missing, the stool may seem to stand until it is subjected to a little shaking.

INCLUSIVE

For any business to succeed in the long term, it should, from the very outset, be both inclusive and sustainable. This is not just about spending part of the revenues on corporate social responsibility. It is about ensuring that the business DNA supports people's aspirations and protects the planet from destruction. The bus which caused the deaths of 56 people, probably did not have safety as part of its DNA.

CONSIDERATION

There is a good reason why every business should never ignore people and the planet. By evaluating your full impact on people and the planet, you can come up with the correct price for your product or service. So, for instance, if a bus company is charging Sh700 per passenger for a one-way trip from Nairobi to Kakamega, it may come to the realisation that the actual fare could even be double that amount when safety, efficiency, emissions and employees are taken into consideration.

PRICING

Business is not just business. Business is business when it has, as part of its DNA, a plan to advance people's aspirations, not having a negative impact on the environment (lowering as much as possible), calculates the correct pricing for its product or service and still makes a reasonable return on its investment. The bottom line is not today's profit, but growing a sustainable business that will be good for the people, the planet and profit.

*Ms Boomsma is the Director, Sustainable Inclusive Business.
karin@sustainableinclusivebusiness.com.*



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