

Reflections on two terms as Vice Chairperson of Makerere University Council

The Farewell and Welcoming Dinner of the outgoing and in-coming Councils of
Makerere University

Kampala Serena Hotel, Victoria Hall on Tuesday January 11, 2011

INTRODUCTION

I wish to start by acknowledging how profound a learning experience my eight-year tenure as Council Deputy Chair has been. It has touched and formed me and my family so fundamentally that we do not believe we will ever be the same again.

1. Reflections

I was privileged in 2009 to deliver a keynote address to the Inter-University Council of East Africa Vice Chancellors on the subject of Governance challenges of the 21st century in E. Africa. The many challenges that were discussed were ones that I have rubbed shoulders with during my tour of service at Makerere University. I will briefly touch on a few of the most interesting ones.

1.1 Governance

You will all be aware of the eventful historical journey in governance that Makerere University has travelled from colonial control to some liberalized aspects under the University of East Africa, to near totalitarianism under two previous regimes and on to the precarious liberalized governance we have under the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (UOTIA) today. I will illustrate my choice of the term precarious with my personal encounter with the ironies of our current system, which bring governance issues into sharp focus.

In December 2002, the staff led by MUASA chose to ignore Council's advice and went on a month long strike over a salary increment previously promised by government. It was election time and my Chairman left to join in the political fray. There was so much liberty that at some critical periods the Vice Chancellor and then

the Acting V/Chancellor, without consulting the Council Chair, left for international engagements. The Ag. Ag. V/Chancellor then fell sick and I was left at the helm with two faithful guards, the US and the Bursar. MUASA's negotiations backfired and they had to revert to Council. My small team negotiated with them making it very clear that funds could only be made available by deducting from AIA allocations to their academic units. MUASA agreed to this but not before non-academic staff threatened to strike if only academic staff received increments. Council awarded all its employees salary increments from AIA funds and the strike ended a few days before Council's term of office expired on December 20, 2006. Ironically, MUASA were to strike again in 2007 over limited operating funds at academic units, alleging that Council had erred in using AIA funds to finance staff salaries.

The consequence of this and other abuses of the loopholes in the Act have led to a definite move to re-introduce stiffer regulation of our Public University systems. Indeed, eight years of implementing the UOTIA have laid bare its many loopholes. Serious problems have arisen from the exploitation of these loopholes which now threaten to reverse some hard-won reforms. I wish to pose two questions for you to ponder:

- (a) Is this a case of an opportunity abused and lost or is it a signal or warning to clean up and consolidate our system and then move on ahead?*
- (b) How can our University Councils consolidate and responsibly exercise the partial autonomy that is coming to them in order to convince their stakeholders that the universities deserve more of this autonomy to evolve into functional universities of the future?*

1.2 Student Affairs

I have lived through periods of both frequent student unrest and the relative calm that we have had of late. I interacted closely with the students twice; once at Guild level in 2008 when they were pushing for a strike to protest Council's denial of their demand for the re-introduction of examination re-takes (a feature of the old term

system as opposed to the semester system); and then when I chaired the Student Guild Election Tribunal after the most recent Guild elections in 2010. My experience in both cases was the sense that the majority of students were genuinely struggling to understand and resolve issues but were up against negative forces from adults in the wider society. I'd like to pay tribute to the Student Dean then, Pastor John Ekudu, who had the capacity to empathize totally with the students and worked with me to resolve both conflicts amicably. I would agree with bringing the students into all important fora and giving them hands-on training in running their own and institutional affairs.

1.3 Academic and Professional Matters

This point exemplifies our constant concern for the quality of our academic and training programs and qualifications. In 2007 I came across two Masters' graduates in the staff development programme who went abroad to Europe to pursue their PhDs. They reported their dismay at discovering that the content and skills they had covered in their Masters programme back at Makerere was only equivalent to a Bachelors level programme at their host university. They had to do the Masters all over again to enable them cope with the stringencies of the PhD degree. In the process, they were patriotic enough to return home and advise that the Masters programme be upgraded.

This is probably not an isolated indicator of the quality of some of our academic courses and the effectiveness of programme accreditation procedures. One of the challenges we have had at Makerere, being the mother of most regional institutions, is the willingness, or lack of it, to accept scrutiny and regulation of our academic programmes by an external authority. We have, however, made progress in the last few years. Council approved the Quality Assurance Policy in 2007 and established a unit, now the Directorate of Quality Assurance which has embraced the guidelines set by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). New courses are now

thoroughly vetted before approval through Senate and Council and existing courses are being streamlined to eliminate wasteful duplication.

1.4 Tackling Gender challenges

At policy level, Council has been active in providing for gender needs in university policies including enacting gender-specific policies e.g., the Sexual Harassment Policy. The combination of all these strategies has so far leveraged the doubling of the female student population from 22% in 1990 to 45% in 2008. At the recent graduation ceremony in 2010, a little over 50% of the graduants were female, up from 46.2% in 2008. Council policies have so far brought forth a pioneer female Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and several female Deputy Chairpersons of Council. The university continues its efforts to equalize the admission and graduation of male and female students. It is healthy that leaders in the gender units are beginning to talk about allowing females to stand their ground, free of affirmative action, in some faculties where they out-number males. However, Council still has an uphill task in increasing female participation in science and technology courses as well as promoting the advancement of female scholars and administrators into the top leadership ranks of the university.

2.0 The Future

I also happen to be a future-oriented educator and would therefore like to project into where we are headed as a University. For this purpose, I wish to borrow from the vision of one features' writer whose analysis of issues I usually find interesting. This is what Kalinge-Nyago presented in 2009 as his vision of the future university in E. Africa:

- 📌 *A university without walls, a virtual learning community, facilitated by technological developments;*
- 📌 *Students studying from Information Technology (IT) bases in or near their homes, which provide individualized learning programmes managed by elite groups of teachers at satellite education centres. The students enjoy*

a greater freedom of choice of interdisciplinary subjects or courses and flexible study calendars;

-  *University leadership consisting of a chief executive (maybe Vice Chancellor), who may possibly, but not necessarily have educational experience but will be particularly skilled at problem-solving, delegation, coordination and have a strong command of Information and Communication Technology (ICT);*
-  *Government that is no longer funding a few full-time students but is spreading expenditure over meaningful elements of learning in higher education. The university will be able to triple its intake using distance, on-line learning methods at a fraction of the cost of residential, full-time study. Overall, the consequence will be mass university education for citizens, including learning for non-degree purposes.*
(Omar Kalinge-Nnyago, 2009)

I am encouraged by the advancements I have seen in the last eight years that I think we could hold up against Nyago's vision and reassure ourselves that we are on our way to the future university. I summarize some of them below.

- Training in ICT is at the forefront of activities and methods that will advance Makerere into the future dotcom era. The Faculty offers training in ten specialized facilities, some of which connect to up to 53 African Union countries, providing communication for purposes of tele-education and tele-medicine. Wireless connectivity in the students' residences on and off campus and the online MakULA facility at the University Library also represent the beginnings of virtual learning sites.
- The hi-tech and community-responsive research and innovations that are unfolding in the Faculties of Technology, Food Science, Veterinary Science and the Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI), among others, give us a glimpse of the future in which Makerere University should measure up to the best institutions on the continent.

3.0 Conclusion

As I conclude, I want to offer you a legacy, - one of values and attitudes within which all our advancements should be accomplished. This is a legacy to the incoming Council, the entire University community and especially our children, the students. Let them take this legacy with them as they head out for leadership and citizenry in our country. The legacy is in the form of a verse.

[*World = country = Makerere University*]

The World needs Men and Women

Who cannot be bought;

Whose word is their bond;

Who put character above wealth;

Who possess opinions and a will;

Who are larger than their vocations;

Who do not hesitate to take chances;

Who will not lose their individuality in a crowd;

Who will be as honest in small things as in great things;

Who will make no compromise with wrong;

Whose ambitions are not defined by their selfish desires;

Who will not say they do it "because everybody else does it";

Who are true to their friends through good report and evil report, in adversity as well as in prosperity;

Who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning and hardheadedness are the best qualities for winning success;

Who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for truth when it is unpopular;

Who can say "NO" with emphasis, although all the rest of the world says "yes".

[Author: Anonymous]

I maintain that these are fundamental values that will far outlive all challenges present and future. If we live them and hand them over to each next generation we will have truly *built for the future*.

Thank you so much for accepting us in Council with all our shortcomings, to be part of this building and molding effort at Makerere University.

We build for the future

Mrs. Christine R.M. Kiganda, Vice Chairperson of Council (Dec 2002 - Dec 2010).