



Makerere wants bursaries for poor

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MAKERERE University has asked the Government to create more bursaries for the poor to help them get higher education.

The chancellor, Prof. Mondo Kagonyera, yesterday argued that the current Government scholarship scheme benefits mostly children from wealthy families who attend top schools.

He said under-privileged students who go to rural schools cannot compete for the limited places, worsening social inequalities in the country.

Speaking at the first day of the institution's 61st graduation, Kagonyera said the current scheme needed to be replaced with a more reasonable bursary system to cater for the poor.

Bursaries for the poor, said Kagonyera, would enable thousands of bright but deprived rural students attain higher education, adding that this could speed up the government's rural transformation agenda.

Kagonyera caused laughter when he said he would rather see a poor student get government support to attend university than his child, who can afford to pay the tuition.

"Under the current system, scholarships are taken by children from expensive secondary schools in and around Kampala. These are sons and daughters of rich people who can afford to pay tuition at university. We need to rethink this position," he said.

Kagonyera said the merit scholarship system had widened the gap between two different worlds in the country; the haves and the have-nots.

"No matter how intelligent they are, it is unlikely that children in a remote region like Karamoja, Moyo, Kanungu or Kisoro can perform better than their counterparts in good schools in Kampala to get scholarships."

Uganda has five public universities where Government-sponsored students are admitted. These are Makerere, Mbarara, Kyambogo, Gulu and Busitema universities.

Initially, 2,000 scholarships were given to the best A' level performers annually. The number was increased to 4,000 in 2001. President Yoweri Museveni recently promised to raise the number to 6,000 starting next academic year.

Yesterday, Kagonyera also spoke with passion about the need for the Government to increase funding for higher education, which he said is directly intertwined with economic development.

A total of 46 students, mainly Makerere University staff, were conferred upon PhDs out of the 2,099, who graduated yesterday. The majority were students from science courses, including medicine, crop science and electrical engineering, among others.

A total of 13,296 students will be awarded diplomas and degrees by the end of the week. Of these, 6,495 or 48.8% are female, while 236 scored first-class degrees.

For the second year in a row, the university issued students' transcripts before graduation. The vice-chancellor, Prof. Venasius Baryamureeba, said the students received the transcripts in November last year.

He also promised that the students, save for those graduating on Thursday and Friday, will receive their certificates on the day of graduation.

This will ease their hunt for employment, according to Baryamureeba.

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