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## Opinion

### At 90 – Is Makerere still building for the future? Publish Date: Aug 07, 2012

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By George W. Ntambaazi

President Museveni on Saturday flagged off [Makerere University](#) 90 year celebrations since it started as a technical college in 1922. For nine decades, Makerere has focused on teaching, research and creating outreach networks in higher education in the East African region and worldwide.

The university remains unique in its size, internationality and inter-disciplinary set up. Over the years, Makerere has evolved into an important location attracting a number of institutions dealing with development policy and cooperation. This is in line with the government strategic priority areas that comply with realising the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

It is against this background that the government and development partners are committed to investing in higher education as a fundamental basis for development.

Funds to Makerere are meant to empower students and staff to develop the awareness and skills needed to function and thrive in the modern world. This enables them generate ideas and knowledge that can further be distributed and applied as impulses for addressing societal challenges.

However, looking back on the 90 years of its existence, means looking at achievements, opportunities and challenges.

According to acting vice chancellor, Prof. Venacious Baryamureeba, Makerere's greatest achievement is training the region's human resource, and inadequate funding is the biggest obstacle in regaining its past glory. For MISR Director Prof. Mahmood Mamdani, there is need to reform the motivational structures so Makerere attracts and rewards scholars and discourages and keeps away those who wish to mint millions.

From the court of public opinion, however, the greatest obstacle at Makerere is infighting and stupid politics and biggest challenge is ensuring accountability for the funds particularly its own internally generated and donor funds that has tainted its image.

Last year, Makerere moved from faculty to interdisciplinary collegiate university. This saw a merger of different units of the same disciplines and reconciled the critical review of some of its

most outstanding scholars on its place in the market place.

This rapid expansion has placed many strains on it, particularly as its extent and disciplinary pattern were largely not well planned and its long term effects unforeseen. The results have, therefore, been manifold, affecting the intellectual development of the individual disciplines, the balance between theoretical and applied research and teacher/student ratio.

Makerere is, therefore, undeniably at the centre of several conflicting demands including the pressure to provide more flexible structures for the conduct of teaching and research into actual evidence - based problems and solutions.

Interestingly, majority of Makerere graduates are active in Uganda and world-wide in different fields. However, some are still painfully roaming the streets without jobs due to the mismatch between qualifications and required skills and the resurgent brain drain taking a toll of numerous others.

Due to limited resources, the university is still lacking in adequately empowering a future generation of well-trained scholars and field researchers in new strategic areas like renewable energies, contagious diseases like Ebola and noddng disease, productive land use, security studies, geo-politics and sustainable development.

Against this background of the complexity of challenges, the University’s 10-year Strategic plan 2008/9 – 2018/2019 should be reviewed and re-molded along innovative strategic lines if it is to produce more tangible multipliers.

As Makerere community celebrates 90 years, the dilemma is whether we can loudly say that Makerere is successfully proving its mission of building for the future. Ninety years of existence are not in any way too few to allow one to draw robust conclusions.

*The writer is a Makerere alumni and Coordinator Governance Network International (GNI)*



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