

**REMARKS BY PROFESSOR MARY JN OKWAKOL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (NCHE) AT A MEETING OF  
THE UGANDA VICE CHANCELLORS' FORUM (UVCF), ON MONDAY 9<sup>TH</sup>  
DECEMBER 2019 AT MAKERERE UNIVERSITY,**

- The Chairperson UVCF
  - The Executive Director UVCF,
  - Our Host, the Vice Chancellor, Makerere University, represented by the DVC (AA)
  - Vice Chancellors /their representatives,
  - The Academic Registrar, Makerere University,
  - Ladies and Gentlemen.
1. I bring warm greetings from the National Council for Higher Education.
  2. I wish to sincerely appreciate your having invited me to join you in today's meeting and also make some remarks. Thank you.
  3. The question I would like all to answer I - Who amongst us today would not want to have accessible, equitable, relevant and sustainable higher education in Uganda?
  4. Your invitation, requested me to talk about my aspirations as the new Executive Director of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). First, let me state that your call for this very important discussion is not only timely, but a clear indication of how much, as key players in the provision of Higher Education, you value the partnership with NCHE in human capital development in this Country. I will focus my remarks on the theme, '***a collective effort in ensuring accessible, equitable, relevant and sustainable Higher Education: the role of Vice Chancellors***'.

5. Let me, at the outset, record the appreciation of NCHE for all your various contributions to the growth of Higher Education in Uganda. Thank you very much.
6. Colleagues, as it is always said, a strong Higher Education subsector in a nation, is the engine for spurring socio-economic transformation. Therefore, the future of our country lies squarely in our hands, as key players. What we do, and how we do it in the respective universities will indeed have a strong bearing on the future of our next generations.
7. Ladies and Gentlemen, much as a lot has been done, there is still a lot of work to be done, more especially in our pursuit to attain accessible, equitable, relevant and sustainable Higher Education in this country. I aspire, and all of us should aspire, to see transformative institutions built – institutions that will transform society by doing the following:
  - ❑ " Universities in Uganda are not producing relevant and quality graduates"- that is what every newspaper in the country is saying. Ensure provision of opportunities for transformative student education and learning by developing and implementing relevant and competence based academic programmes. Programmes that are aligned to the national development priorities - Vision 2040, NDP (11 and soon 111). We should also be mindful of regional and international obligations Uganda has committed herself to such as the EA Vision 2030, Agenda 2063, STISA 2024, and SDGs. In doing so you are urged to engage employers in both private and public sectors, as well as past students. Imparting of appropriate skills and competences is a must, so as to enhance competitiveness and employability of graduates.
  - ❑ Devise ways of increasing access by learners to University – adopt strategies to exploit the full potential of all. May qualify but few access this education. For instance, in the past three years, learners who qualified to

access Higher education were over 190,000. Uganda's gross enrolment ratio is very low at 6.85% below the East African regional average of 9%, and a global average of 24%. Increasing infrastructure and facilities at Universities and establishing distance learning centres are among strategies that can be considered

- ❑ Strengthening research and innovation by stimulating research excellence and impact through institutional partnerships/collaborations so to leverage resources. Ideally, each University should aim at developing an Innovation and Incubation Center so as to enhance the country's capacity to produce patents and commercialization of research products. It is my wish that we have a National Research and Innovation fund established.
- ❑ Increasing a pool of PhD holders on staff (to support teaching, research and supervision), as well as increasing rates of PhD production in your respective Universities is desirable.
- ❑ Universities need to engage communities more so as to improve economic and social transformation by designing and implementing relevant and quality outreach programmes. This is a way of transferring knowledge and technologies thereby ensuring relevance of Higher Education to communities.
- ❑ In case you have not embraced total quality assurance, do it. Some institutions focus only on academic quality assurance. Prepare for ISO Certification.
- ❑ Universities are expected to support policy dialogue and reform in the country by linking with national leader's/policy makers to facilitate flow of knowledge so as to enhance transformation. NCHE is seeking establishment

of a platform for a regular policy dialogue on higher education with Government and Parliament.

- ❑ Promote knowledge exchange to cause positive change in institutions and the country by holding conferences and publishing journals. I encourage institutional conferences, exhibitions and journals. At the NCHE we hold annual conferences and annual exhibitions- all Universities are urged to participate in these activities. I invite you to participate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Higher Education Conference (16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020) and the 12<sup>th</sup> Higher Education Exhibition (19<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> March 2020) under the theme ‘Higher Education and the Private Sector Engagement: Preparing Human Resource for the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution.’ at the UMA Showground. The 4IR is with us. You should upskill and reskill staff and students to prepare them for it so that Uganda is not left behind.
- ❑ Strengthening and mainstreaming ICT in teaching, research, and technology transfer and management functions of Higher Education institutions to enhance access, quality and service delivery – it is necessary for transforming Higher Education. NCHE has reviewed capacity indicators to embrace ICT labs and Wi-Fi to be key indicators of readiness to start a University/programmes. There is also need for robust data and information management systems. Recent developments eg Zeevasity, AIMS, e-resources, e-learning platforms (blackboard, moodle) in Universities are appreciated. NCHE encourages Higher Education Institutions to invest in technology as opposed to big structures eg libraries. We have established a Management Information System (MIS) which is interactive and should enable Universities to interact with NCHE without needing physical presence.

- ❑ Establish structures needed to provide good leadership, governance and quality control – Councils, Council Committees, Senates, Senate Committees, Management teams.
- ❑ Universities and other higher education institutions should abide by the principle of gender equality by having it reflected in students, staff, Management teams, Senates, and Councils/Council Committees. Institute Gender Mainstreaming Programmes in your universities. In this regard, it has been observed that women are underrepresented in Science, Technology and Innovations (STI) efforts. Vice Chancellors are urged to promote inclusive gender participation in STI.
- ❑ Establish sustainable and increased long-term funding to your universities through building the capacity of managers and staff to find solutions to funding and financial gaps and encouraging partnerships between your institutions to generate economies of scale. There is need for the Universities to diversify sources of revenue.
- ❑ Increase internationalization by encouraging collaboration between institutions in different countries in areas of staff and students exchange

8. I now wish to turn to the issue of non-chartered Universities. In January 2019, NCHE invited all universities holding provisional licenses beyond three years and an agreement was reached for each affected university to submit its roadmap to Charter acquisition to NCHE by end of April 2019. I am glad to inform you that the majority of the affected universities did comply. We thereafter organized a monitoring exercise to the affected universities with the hope of providing the needed support for their progression to the Charter status. It is my hope that these Universities are working hard to fulfill the requirements of a chartered University.

9. The other matter of concern to us as NCHE is the level, nature and conduct of how universities are making affiliations contrary to Section 16 of the Statutory Instrument No. 34 of 2008. There are clear guidelines on how to effect an affiliation, certainly with the approval of NCHE. Unfortunately, a number of universities are not adhering to the above provision which could result into penalties in accordance with Section (17) of the same Instrument which stipulates that, ***“A person who contravenes these regulations commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding one hundred currency points.”*** So please, let us do the right things in an orderly manner.
10. For the holders of a Charter, the law requires that ***“An institution granted a Charter—shall carry out continuous internal self-assessment after every two years, and a Charter shall be renewable after every five years after an external evaluation by the National Council”***.
11. The practice of institutional self-assessment and peer-evaluation is a requirement in both public and private institutions. I must recognize Makerere University for being compliant in carrying out institutional self-assessment and providing NCHE with its reports. For the rest, we are on the verge of writing to all universities holding a Charter to demand that they comply.
12. Colleagues, my expectation of yourselves, as partners in human capital development in this country, is to be steadfast in ensuring that your respective training institutions do what is right all the time. These include;
- a) Observance of principles of good governance where everyone plays a separate part in the entire governance and managerial value-chain.
  - b) Improving the infrastructure and facilities of your institution so they are a model of recognition. I am conscious of the issue of funding, as I mentioned earlier on is a critical ingredient in accomplishing the desired

outcome, but we should think strategically in lobbying for example, and utilizing the available resources efficiently.

- c) Maintaining standards by ensuring that you only roll out academic programmes which have been accredited by NCHE, and ensuring that re-accreditation is done every after five years. If you submit a programme and it is not accredited right away, do not consider it condemned. NCHE does give comments for improvement of such programmes and can also provide guidance as necessary. Offering unaccredited programmes is a disservice to the learners as their qualifications are not recognized by NCHE. Similarly a programme that is not submitted for re-accreditation after five years is as good as not accredited. So have programmes re-accredited in a timely manner.
- d) Hire qualified staff.
- e) Admit only eligible students and consequently teach and fairly examine their performance. You and I know that the media is awash with inappropriate treatment of students in some training institutions; unfairly under-marking a student's coursework, sex for marks practices to mention a few! As leaders of institutions you need to go an extra mile to stamp out these evils.
- f) Ensure that you only affiliate with recognized training institutions with prior approval from NCHE.
- g) Avail the required data and information to National Council, since it is a requirement under the law.

13. Please permit me also to make this appeal; we are all players in Higher Education. There is need for us to engage in a transparent, professional and ethical manner. My expectation of you all, as Heads of trainings institutions is

that as colleagues, you are at liberty to call me, come to my office, or invite me to your office whenever there are issues to sort out. But I have noted with surprise how sometimes, I get a letter or call from higher authorities, to discuss issues which in my opinion are indeed resolvable and would not require intervention of the higher authorities! Please, let's work together in a collegial manner.

14. To answer the question I started with - We all want to ***accessible, equitable, relevant and sustainable Higher Education in Uganda. Let us (NCHE and Universities) continue working at it. I therefore call for collective efforts – Vice Chancellors and NCHE.***
15. There are surely a lot of things we can share, but for today, let me stop here by once again thanking you all, and wishing you successful deliberations.

I wish you a Merry Christmas, a peaceful festive season and a fruitful year 2020.

Professor Mary JN. Okwakol, PhD  
**Executive Director, National Council for Higher Education**