



***PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN UGANDA***

PRESENTED

BY

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AT THE CELEBRATIONS TO COMMEMORATE 50 YEARS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EAST AFRICA

SATURDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2013

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

Our Guest of Honour, Hon. Prof. Ephraim Kamuntu, Minister of Water and Environment, representing H.E. the President of Uganda

The Hon. Minister of Education and Sports

The Chancellor, Makerere University

The Chairperson of Makerere University Council

Colleagues from the Universities of Nairobi and Dar-es Salaam

Government Officials Present

Alumni of the University of East Africa

The Keynote Speaker, Prof. Ngugi Wa Thiongo

Members of the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Family and the Foundation

My Colleagues from Makerere University

Makerere University Students

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I welcome you to Makerere University and I thank you for accepting our invitation. Today, we celebrate the great institution, the University of East Africa, which gave birth to the three leading Universities in East Africa, namely; Universities of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam as well as Makerere University, the fountain of Higher Education in Uganda.

Higher Education, which is the backbone of any economy, is the system through which teaching, learning, research, transfer partnerships and international cooperation and understanding are brought together.

During the post-independence period, African Higher Education played an important role in providing high-level human resource in areas pertaining to political, social and economic development and in promoting research. And this was indeed, true of the University of East Africa.

The political and economic upheavals that characterised many of the African Countries marked the onset of the development challenges being experienced by many of our institutions in the provision of higher education. This was partly due to the paradigm shift where many key stakeholders in the provision of higher education including National Governments and International Development Cooperation Agencies focused their attention to provision of basic and secondary education in developing countries, to the disadvantage of Higher Education. This was based on the argument that social and economic returns from basic education were far greater than those from Higher Education. The World Bank, for example, reduced the proportion of funds allocated to higher education from 17% for the period 1985-89 to just 7% over the period 1995-2000. This perception towards higher education subsequently changed at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Higher Education is now recognised by the International Development Cooperation Agencies as playing a very important role in political, social and economic development.

The World Bank now affirms that tertiary education is essential for the promotion of greater social cohesion, inspiring confidence in social institutions, as well as encouraging democratic participation through open debate. Higher Education further brings about an appreciation of diversity in gender, ethnicity and religion, thus promoting national unity.

The Uganda Vision 2040 provides plans and strategies to *transform the Ugandan society from a peasant to a modern, prosperous and competitive upper middle-income country within 30 years*. To attain this projected level of development, the country will have to exploit its enormous opportunities including oil and gas, tourism, minerals, ICT business, abundant youthful labour force, strategic geographical location, fresh water resources, industries and agriculture. These opportunities can only be harnessed through strengthening the physical infrastructure; Science, Technology, Engineering and Innovation (STEI); and above all through concentration on human capital development.

The Government of Uganda has provided an enabling environment and taken on initiatives geared towards enhancing higher education through:-

1. Liberalisation of the provision of higher education. The higher education space is now open to both public and private sectors. The result has been an expansion of higher education from one University to more than 35 universities in Uganda, six of them public.
2. Over the last 10 years, Government has been offering scholarships to 4,000 students, distributed across all public universities.

This however represents only 6% of total eligible candidates. To address the access and equity challenges, the FY 2013/14 national budget, proposed a Revolving Students Loan Scheme. We appreciate the Government for this initiative.

Worthwhile to note is the growing interest of the private sector in higher education. For example, the Madhvani Foundation, Tullow Oil Uganda and Vision for Africa International, among others, continue to invest in higher education through provision of scholarships to Ugandans to pursue undergraduate and post graduate education, both in Uganda and abroad.

I am happy to note that there are various International Development Cooperation Agencies investing in Higher Education in Uganda. These include the World Bank and the African Development Bank. The Higher Education, Science and Technology project of The African Development Fund will support six public universities and two strategic tertiary education institutions. It seeks to make higher education more relevant to skills development and employment creation by developing partnerships with the private sector and enhancing research networks. This is expected to make Uganda well linked to other centers of excellence regionally and internationally. This model will ensure that graduates are also suited to jobs beyond the local market, thus contributing to reducing the current youth unemployment. It will promote the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in training and improving efficiency in delivery.

In its current Strategic Plan, Makerere University seeks to reposition herself to meet emerging development challenges by playing a leading role in the provision of higher education in Uganda and beyond.

The University's response has been through: innovations in Teaching & Learning; research responsive to national and international development needs; and partnerships that enhance collaboration and networking in the provision of higher education. In the same vein, issues of quality assurance and gender have taken centre stage in the operations of the University.

### **Innovations in Teaching and Learning:**

- a) This constitutes development of ICT solutions for teaching and learning through distance and web-based learning. Initiatives such as the Internet Laboratories (i-Labs) have been adopted. To-date, the University has developed 26 online laboratories with over 1, 000 students in the College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (CEDAT) utilizing the i-Labs.
- b) Broadening students' learning through international networks and collaborations. Joint degrees have increasingly been used as a benchmark for staff and students' exposure.
- c) Within the framework of student centred learning, the innovations in teaching and learning have entailed integration of field attachments and internships in order to improve the viability and relevancy of their training. Indeed, this creates an opportunity for a broader outlook for our graduates.

## **Research & innovations responsive to national & international development needs:**

In order to address issues of national development, the University has adopted a dynamic and broad **Research Agenda**. It reflects national priorities and promotes both basic and applied research. Our Research Agenda has been used both as the vehicle for the University's contribution to knowledge advancement and the avenue through which academia is linked to policy and other evidence based national development concerns.

Allow me to mention some of the agencies that have boosted the research thrust of Makerere University. These include Sida/SAREC, NORAD, NUFFIC, USAID and the American Foundations, African Capacity Building Foundation, and the African Economic Research Consortium, among others.

Our Guest of Honour, the Presidential Initiative for Science and Technology has joined this category that has enhanced the research capacity in Makerere University.

For a long time, the University's research output was limited to academic purposes and did not translate into production. Makerere University is now moving towards **incubation and Commercialisation of innovations** by taking advantage of the forward and backward linkages between our institution and the productive sectors. Incubation centres have been established particularly in technology enterprises, commercial clusters and food value chains.

It is foreseen that with the theory/knowledge and practical skills imparted from the incubation centres, spin-off enterprises will emerge to provide employment not only to the University graduates but also to the wider business community. We appreciate the Government support that has played a key role in this endeavour of skills development.

**Partnerships that enhance collaboration & networking in provision of relevant higher education** have been developed. These partnerships ensure that the knowledge generated meets existing and emerging community development needs. This includes initiatives that focus on health, lifestyle and infectious diseases; agricultural innovations, which address issues of drought and food security; Governance, leadership and legislative challenges, to mention but a few.

### **Access of Women to Higher Education**

Makerere University continues to implement its affirmative action scheme aimed at increasing access of girls to higher education. The Female Scholarship Foundation has supported close to 800 disadvantaged but academically gifted female students. Women emancipation and gender mainstreaming have played a pivotal role in the operations of the University. The University strategic plan, articulates Gender Mainstreaming as a cross cutting issue, and Makerere University has been commended for championing gender both as a discipline and a practice at national and international levels. Yet this notwithstanding, challenges of parity still persist. Affirmative action in the spheres of teaching, learning and research remain a major prospect for equity and access.



There are, however, several challenges that the higher education sector must take into consideration in order to foster its contribution to sustainable human development.

**(a) Inadequate Funding**

The resources available to higher education in Uganda are still inadequate to enable us to effectively respond to the rapid expansion in student enrolment and basic requirements for education and research. As a consequence, the quality of teaching and research has been affected and staff & students' welfare continue to decline. Attraction and retention of skilled professionals in Uganda continue to be a big challenge. Makerere University is currently operating at 45% of its staff establishment. Our appeal to Government is to increase its allocation to higher education. In the same vein, Universities too need to diversify their sources of income through innovative strategies including Public-Private Partnerships as well as through our Alumni of the University of East Africa and Makerere University. This is our institution.

**(b) Massification of Higher Education**

The rapid student expansion continues to be a main challenge to higher education providers. The mismatch between student growth and facilities has been singled out as a characteristic of higher education institutions in developing countries. This has resulted into overcrowded classrooms and insufficiency in the learning environment.

### **(c) Limited Tertiary Institutions**

The higher education sector is made up of tertiary institutions and Universities, which together provide immense potential for the development of the Country. In Uganda however, there has been an erosion of tertiary institutions over the years. Several of them have witnessed decline due to under-funding and some of them have been transformed into Universities. This has definitely denied the economy the necessary and unique skills generated from these institutions.

### **(d) Rising Youth Unemployment**

The Uganda Bureau of Statistics has indicated that worldwide, Uganda is the leading country with the youngest population of 78 % below the age of 30 years. Currently 21.3% Ugandans are in the age group of 18 – 30 years. Of the students who graduated in 2011, only 33% were able to find employment in the formal sector. This is partly explained by the small private sector and the failure to match the skills needed in the economy. I am happy to note that Makerere University is aware and has taken steps to meet this challenge. All our curricula have been reviewed to meet the demands of the economy. We would like to make sure that our graduates are employable and are able to create jobs.

Our Guest of Honour, Ladies and Gentlemen, as we celebrate the legacy of Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere today, I commend his foresight in identifying the issues of gender equity during a period when the subject was almost a taboo. The issues he underscores in his book *“Women’s Freedom: Women are Eagles, Not Chickens”*, which will be launched this afternoon, have remained relevant to date.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude by re-emphasizing that Makerere University is committed to its Vision "*To be the leading institution for academic excellence and innovations in Africa*". In spite of the various challenges, Makerere University is determined to provide innovative teaching, learning, research and services responsive to national and global needs.

I thank you.