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How to solve strikes in public universities

The current staff strike and student commotions at Makerere University are a tip of an iceberg. Staff and student activists cannot be resolved by firefighting them with Police or other security forces. Fundamental causes of these strikes and the current governance problems must be studied, analysed and addressed to resolve current problems in our university system. Changes of vice chancellors will not resolve the problems. Neither will giving more funds to staff nor students. There are structural problems that must be studied to resolve current disquiet in our institutions of higher learning. Factors causing commotion at Makerere are present in all public, and some private universities.

Currently, Ugandan universities have massive problems making it difficult for them to fulfill their obligations to society. A few of their staff engage in innovative studies, produce impressive publications or register acclaimed patents. Less than 15% of our university academic staff hold PhDs or terminal degrees, the apparently lowest qualification for university teaching and knowledge production.

My humble suggestion is that a thorough study of the problems of our universities be done, problems identified, a type of university Uganda needs defined and a national dialogue on this issue conducted. Firefighting, band aid treatment or changing of individuals will not resolve issues. My suggestion is not novel for such studies have been done of our education system. Since the early colonial period, Uganda has constantly posed and rethought how it educates its young. The history of education indicates that the country has posed, on average every twenty-five years to re-examine its education system. Twenty-five years after the so-called Uganda Agreement of 1900, the colonial state invited the Phelps-Jones Commission to study and advice on education. The Commission sent Dr. Hess Jones and Dr. J.K. Aggrey who presented their report in 1925. Several years later, the De La War Commission presented its report in 1937.

After another twenty-six years, in 1951, the Binns Study Group reviewed the education system. The Bernard de Bunsen recommendations of 1952 rendered the Binns report into an operational document. Thirteen years later, Professor Castle presented his recommendations in 1963, one year after independence. His recommendations laid the basis of our current education structure, which was not fundamentally altered by the (Kajubi) Education Policy Review Commission recommendations thirty-two years later in 1989. For universities, various studies and visitations have been mounted including the 1970 Visitation and the McGregor one in 2006/07. I will share my views with readers of what I think are the problems of our universities. But these views are not only personal, they need to be studied, examined and or, modified, to be applicable.

Makerere and other public universities in Uganda have one major challenge from which most of their problems flow as subsidiary streams. That problem is underfunding. The underfunding is exacerbated by a second problem, which is the failure of university leaders to appropriately manage neo-liberal policies impacting on higher education financing. Both problems dovetailed and feed into each other and are strengthened by a legal framework that



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has not been amended to match changing local and global forces impacting on higher education creation, storage and delivery. Makerere's major financial challenge since the early 1980s has been the management of the shift from overdependence on state funding to the market as the larger provider of its funding. The laws that govern the institution's management of finances were not changed to match the changed financial model when the institution adopted neo-liberal practices between 1980 and 2007. In other words, Makerere operates within the neo-liberal constraints in the way it raises about half of its budget without changing the original legal instrument when the state was its only or major financier.

Historically, Makerere and other public universities in Africa were funded by the state, research grants and donations from individuals and organisations as well as endowments (which came from various sources). From its establishment in 1922 up to 1970, Makerere had a broad funding base, which included states and various regional and international donors. Makerere's financial autonomy and direct de-linkage from the state was protected by a medium buffer body, the Grants Committee, through which various financiers funneled funds into it. From the time private fee paying students were admitted in the early 1990s and the institution adopted a dual track fee system, Makerere began to operate, and still operates, within the neo-liberal constraints.

When the state could not fully fund the university for understandable demands the university improvised by getting money from private fees payers and other stakeholders, the state felt that this arrangement should be a permanent solution. But, possibly from fearing loss of influence on university policy, the state did not change or adjust the legal system to fit the changed funding based on neo-liberal beliefs. Neo-liberal views emphasise the supremacy of the market over state regulated systems. Market models regard education as commodities for sale and education institutions as merchants selling education products

to customers called students. According to a number of pro-market writers, the market, rather than the state should provide services including higher education.

Makerere and other public universities need to design a new legal system, a financial structure and a mode of operation to match the changed funding system. Thus, although there was continued private enrolments at the institution, Makerere's financial linkage to the state has remained intact. Yet universities must respond to both national and international forces such as rankings, knowledge production, competition for internationally based research funds, struggle for brilliant academic staff and good students. Good universities are governed beyond the limits of national laws although the state must remain the major regulator of these institutions. According to Varghese, (2006) and Thaver, (2003), a number of institutions in Africa were caught up in this same vicious circle of failing to balance national and international demands.

Although public universities are believed to be making money from private sources, this is not correct. Virtually every one of them is bankrupt, at a point of being so or spending more on each student than is paid for in services for a student by the state, parents, charitable organisations or other stake holders. The state, believing that the market was generating reasonable funds for institutions reduced its contributions to public universities thereby affecting their performance. Incomes from private sources gradually surpassed government funding of Makerere University. In 1993/4 academic year, government contributed 100% to Makerere's budget. But by 2005, the contribution was only 41%. Yet the number of students coming into these institutions was growing faster than the inflow of funds to support the student numbers because a student was taught at a loss of 50% of what was needed to deliver higher education. What should be done? The current crisis in public and other universities will not be resolved by pumping more money into the university as staff and students are demanding unless a thorough study and evaluation of the laws governing universities is revisited, the type of university Uganda needs as an engine of development defined and its relation in knowledge creation and training spelled out. Now that Skilling Uganda might remove the jurisdiction of all diploma-awarding institutions from the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, universities need their own law. This has happened in Kenya and Tanzania and Uganda should not be left behind. Although a general law should be made, each university should be bound by an agreement with the state.

The law should define the relations of each public university with the government in a charter that is specific to each institution as has happened in Kenya and Tanzania. Unlike high schools, each public university is jealously individualistic and gives its own degrees, certificates and diplomas. Each has its own vision and mission and focuses on its own unique programmes. Therefore, each university needs its own terms of relationship with the state within generally agreed government policy parameters.

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Emilian Kayima



To curb crime, look into the future

When the institution of the family is shaky, you can only predict trouble, crime, disorder and unrest. And that makes life difficult, policing complicated and sustainable peace and security a dream. The way to go is to closely examine what is going wrong with a view of correcting it for our own survival and that of our children and their children. And young people are our target group on this mobilisation because they form the bulk of our population.

We must change the trends if we expect different results. And the first persons that require this change are not these young people, but us the old folk; parents, teachers, law enforcement officers to mention but three. We must change attitudes, actions, and look into the future.

By that, we shall be able to appreciate their plight, project their future and help them cope with the current life challenges. This calls for possibly a new form of outlook, focused trainings, change of curriculum and closer working relationships with security agencies especially the Police.

When we mix with them, we appreciate them better and reciprocity is almost automatic.

My father taught me to be honest no matter the consequences

Last week, I was extremely honoured to meet two great men; His eminence Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala, archbishop emeritus Kampala archdiocese and John Nagenda, the senior presidential advisor on media. I visited Nagenda and we talked about many things. The one statement that touched me most is: "My father taught me to be honest no matter the consequences." Can we as parents do and say more of this before our children.

When you look at the modern family, with the current parenting challenges including drugs and absentee parenting, you have reason to fear for tomorrow. Will the youth tomorrow be in position to carry the mantle if they do not get the kind of training, inspiration and guidance that the likes of my friend got from their lovely parents and committed communities back in the day?

Usually, children practice what they have seen. Children are actors. Watch them closely. When they get true love from parents, they tend to love. When we are rude and rough to them, they develop coping mechanisms, most of which hinge on commission of crime. Let us look at our children as the true foundation of the future we wish to enjoy. Have we planted the right seeds? Do we see this manifest in our midst among the youth today?

And sometimes, we the law enforcement officers speak the language of the law that hardly means anything to the youths who are targeted by crime and criminals. Most of them engage in crime in form of drug abuse because of lack of parenting, the wrong environments and limited role models.

Last week, a phone call came in from an inquisitive journalist wanting to know whether it is true that the Uganda Police Force do not respect rights of minorities including the LGBT people.

My answer was and still is; we do not abuse anyone's rights. However, for whoever will commit a crime, a deserving penalty should be meted out.

We stand by this. After all, our sovereign laws are clear on all matters as prescribed by our forefathers, and we are bound to enforce the law to the letter. And matters of law are not matters of suspicion or guess work; they are matters of facts and evidence. That is the line we take.

This is a message for the youth today and parents. I shared the same with the youth in Kampala at Namugongo Martyrs shrine on the Youth Day celebrations.

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