

NEWS

Kiosks mushroom in Main Campus

By Omiti Odhiambo

Not everyone is cursing the Pay-As-You-Eat (PAYE) system at the universities. At least, not those in business. Jack Gitari, a grocer on Mamlaka Road, which runs through the University of Nairobi, is one of those who see a silver lining in the PAYE cloud.

A number of structures have sprouted along the road, which is adjacent to the students' halls of residence, and turned the area into a prime business location. The stretch of land, owned by the Nairobi City Council, has seen a number of business structures come up in the last four years, with over 20 kiosks offering services as shops, grocery stalls, butcheries, eating places, cheekily called 'hotels', and second-hand clothes stalls. The tunnel connecting Main Campus and the halls of residence has hawkers selling stationery and light electrical appliances.

Gitari, who has conducted business in the area for the last one year, however complained that his was an uncertain business due to interruptions in the tenancy of his customers who are mainly students. The semester system and frequent unexpected closures make it difficult to trade normally.

He also lamented about the risks: "...you stock your kiosk with goods (perishables) and within the next few hours, campus is closed." He added

that the mushrooming of the premises is of great concern and suggested that the bad structures should be demolished to ensure high standards of hygiene are maintained. He admitted that the kiosk owners were not organised.

He said that the traders were willing to work with the university for the improvement of the standard of their goods and services. Gitari also decried constant harassment from corrupt university security officers who constantly ask for bribes.

Daniel Ouma and Edwin Onyango, both fourth year B.A students, told *The Anvil* that the kiosks have mushroomed more since the introduction of the PAYE system in all public universities a few years ago, which has resulted in the increase in meal prices at the university messes. This has impacted differently on most undergraduate students as some have resorted to cooking in their rooms while others have decided to become non-residents.

Asked whether the increase in the number of kiosks has encouraged the students to cook in the rooms, Dan said, "... they do not encourage cooking but make it easier." While the students agree that the kiosks provide the student with what to cook, they had misgivings on structures mushrooming without a proper plan, something they said could cause health hazards.

They opposed any attempts to demolish the structures in future,



Picture by Evelyn Mwakina

Hotel & Bar: The price of paying as you eat at university

saying that this would cause more problems than it would solve. They said that students depended on the kiosks heavily, and suggested that the university catering department should lower food prices in the mess, improve the quality of meals, and extend the evening closing hours to probably nine o'clock.

Stella Mulama, a first year B.A student, told *The Anvil* that the issue of the butchery and other eating kiosks situated along the same road is even more disturbing. She decried the pathetic sanitary condition of these 'hotels' which also double as

drinking places but with no organised waste disposal system, let alone lavatories.

While appreciating the necessity of these kiosks, she recommended that the university run them for better management, like the 'Mamlaka Steers' which is run by the institution's catering department, or tender such operations to individuals.

The traders heap garbage behind the kiosks and later burn it. Gitari however dismissed claims that they had no source of clean water and pointed at a water tap next to Mamlaka Court on the same road

where he claimed they purchase water for use. He called on the university management to regulate operations but could not say how this could be achieved.

Another student suggested that the university could open up a variety of businesses like shops for purposes of raising income. This could also be a boon to the students who usually go outside the institution whenever they require certain items. Perhaps this way, the scenery along Mamlaka Road could improve but, as it stands now, the structures are a real eyesore and the health dangers certain.