

University Education Soars

By Wamahiu Muya



Anticipation mounts as the graduands await their moment of reckoning.

ONE of the most remarkable developments during the Nyayo era has been the tremendous expansion of higher education. When President Daniel arap Moi came to power in 1978, the country had only one university, the University of Nairobi, which had 8,000 students.

But since then, the country has three other universities, namely: Moi, Kenyatta and Egerton, which have trebled the local university enrolment to 24,000 students.

The massive expansion has been due to the increase in the "A" levels which has meant that more and more candidates qualified to enter the universities but they could not be admitted.

As a result, about 10,000 sixth form leavers were forced to seek university admission overseas. Thus the country was in an awkward situation whereby it had more students in foreign universities than in the local ones. The high number of Kenyans who studied abroad were largely self-sponsored which was a drain on the country's foreign exchange. Another disadvantage was that many students took courses whose curricula was not relevant to the immediate needs of Kenya.

Still others went overseas with very low qualifications which meant they could not be admitted to professional and technical courses in overseas universities, the areas where the country

was still experiencing shortage of skilled manpower. Such students took general degrees in arts and found it difficult to get jobs after their return.

These problems led to the setting of the Presidential Working Party on the Second University under Prof. C. B. Mackay. The party was to look for ways of establishing a second university. However, it went beyond that for besides recommending that the second university be established at Eldoret, it also ushered in the 8-4-4 system of education. The party recommended that the second university should be scientific and technologically-oriented. It also stressed that both primary and secondary school curricula should be restructured and adopt the 8-4-4 format that emphasised on teaching of scientific and technical subjects.

Following this report in 1981, the parliament passed the Moi University Act in 1984 and the new university admitted its first 40 students in forestry in October of the same year. Prof. Douglas Odhiambo was appointed the Vice-Chancellor and Moi University had come home to roost.

Prof. Odhiambo, formerly deputy Vice-Chancellor of University of Nairobi and a leading scientist noted that the new university hopes to produce graduates who are practically oriented. Thus the students are expected to have long periods of attachment in industry during the course of their studies.

The university currently has 1,000 students taking forestry, wildlife management, wood technology, engineering, education and science. In response to the acute shortage of secondary school teachers, the university had to admit a large number of students in the Faculty of Education. However, this does not mean that the university has disgressed from its main objective of producing scientific and technical manpower. Its project plan indicates that it is set to start faculties of medicine, agriculture and veterinary medicine. The university hopes to admit 3,000 students by 1990 and 10,000 students when fully-fledged in middle 1990s.

Kenyatta University also became an autonomous university in 1985 after being a constituent college of the University of Nairobi since 1970. Since 1965 it has been the major trainer of secondary school teachers who took the three year S1 course. But in 1972, it started offering a Bachelor of Education in arts and sciences.

After being an independent university it has been able to diversify its courses and it is already offering B.A. and B.Sc. degrees. Its Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Philip Githinji, says the university is planning to offer Bachelor of Commerce degrees.

The university, with 5,000 students, 40 per cent of them women, is the second largest university in the country after the University of Nairobi. But the university is in dire need of extra facilities so that it can cope with the increased intake. Currently, it is putting up a science and a kitchen complex.

Egerton College, which had been training agricultural technical staff since 1939, became the fourth autonomous university in 1986. Currently, it is offering B.Sc. degrees in horticulture, animal and crop production, home management and agricultural education. It also offers a B.Sc. general course. Despite its new status it has also continued to offer the diploma courses whose graduates are still in high demand.

The Vice-Chancellor of the University, Prof. Richard Musangi, said the university will endeavour to produce practical oriented graduates who are ready to soil their hands as they help the farmers to boost agricultural produce. Therefore, the degree programmes are quite practical and students have to follow a daily routine as normally done in a farm. Thus those doing the animal production course



A well-stocked library forms the core of any learning institution.

have to wake up early in the morning at 4 a.m. and milk cows. Others have to grow and tend crops.

Besides the four public universities, the country has 14 other institutions that offer degrees but mainly in theology. But three of them, namely Daystar University College, United States International University and the University of Eastern Africa, offer normal secular education. This is possible because the institutions are affiliated to accredited American universities which allow them to offer their degrees.

The Daystar University offers B.A. in communications, christian ministries and business administration through the Messiah College, U.S.A. It is planning to start a Bachelor of Education course soon. The United States International University also offers degrees in business administration, international relations and psychology both at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

The University of Eastern Africa at Baraton, Nandi is affiliated to the Andrews College, U.S.A. and is run by the Seventh Day Adventists. It offers degrees in agriculture, business administration, arts and science. The entry requirements to these universities is a good "O" level pass with at least five credits.

The Minister for Education, Mr. Peter Oloo Aringo, says that the government welcomes the establishment of private universities as long as they maintain high academic standards. The private universities are expected to be approved by the Commission for High Education before they are registered by the government. However, so far none of them has yet been given a charter by the Commission to allow it to award its own degrees. But the above universities have made significant developments that may enable them to be given the charter, the minister said.

The Commission, whose secretary is Prof. J. M. Mungai, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, was set in 1985 with a view to harmonise the development of higher education. Besides the opening of new universities, the government has continued to expand the national polytechnics which train middle level technical manpower. The government has opened the Eldoret Polytechnic and continued to expand the three others, namely: Kenya and Mombasa polytechnics and the Jomo Kenyatta College of Agriculture and Technology at Juja.

The four institutions have an enrolment of 6,000 students and offer ordinary and higher diplomas in technical and business courses. However, there are plans to allow them to offer technological degrees in a near future, Mr. Aringo said.

The University of Nairobi, with 10,000 students, still remains the largest university in East and Central Africa. The university has the widest range of faculties and with 2,000 postgraduates students, it is major research centre.

The university started awarding

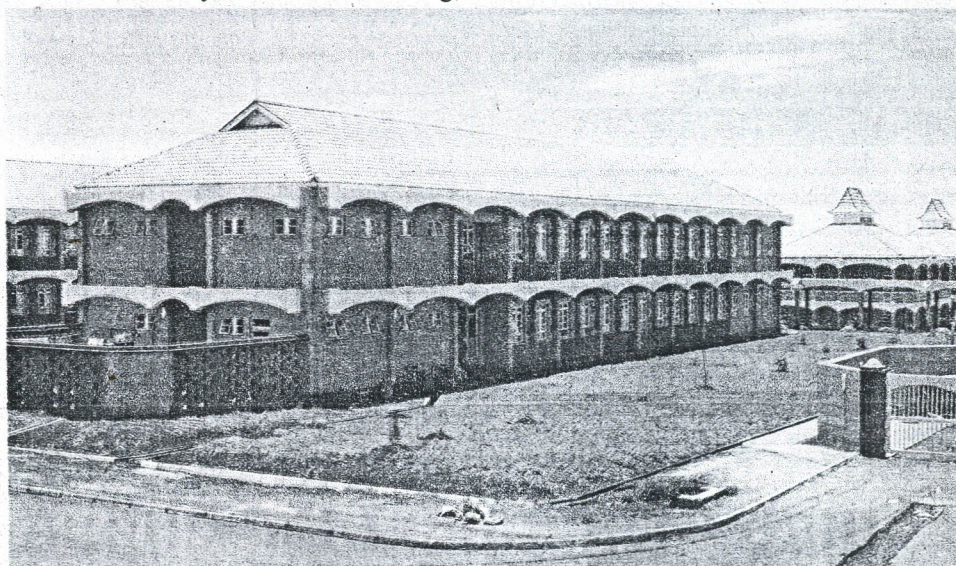
degrees in 1961 when it was the Royal College which later became a constituent college of the now defunct University of East Africa which collapsed in 1970.

The university became autonomous in 1970 when Dr. Josphat Karanja, now the country's Vice-President, became the first Vice-Chancellor. One of the major challenges facing the university is to train skilled manpower particularly for the other younger universities. Its Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Mbithi said the university has streamlined its postgraduate programmes to ensure that students finish their degrees within the prescribed time.

However, all the four state universities face a great challenge that of unprecedented high level of admission in the coming years. Last year, they had a double intake of the 1985 and 1986 "A" levels when 10,000 students were admitted. This year they had to admit 10,000 first year students although they had a capacity to admit only half that number. In 1990, they will have another double intake when they will admit the last "A" level class and the first 8-4-4 candidates.

This calls for massive expansion of facilities. The minister has said that it may be necessary to introduce cost-sharing at the university in order to enable the government to cope with the large number of students seeking admission.

Mr. Aringo says that the students will have to pay for the accommodation expenses while others may have to be day scholars. However, the minister says no poor students will be denied a place because he or she cannot afford to pay. The government is proposing to establish a revolving fund which will replace the current loan scheme which has failed because the ministry has been unable to recover the money given out to ex-students.



Moi University has modern dormitories for its students.