

Nyasani: The don who doubles as broadcaster

BY EDWARD TWINE

January this year saw changes in the leadership of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Nairobi. Prof. J.M. Nyasani was appointed the new Principal, replacing Prof. Onesmus Mutungi, who was promoted to the position of Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic).

Prof. Nyasani is unique in his own right, having talents in academics and journalism. The Lecture-cum-journalist, was until his new appointment, a Dean of the Faculty of Arts in the University.

Born in 1938, Prof. Nyasani attended Gaba Major Seminary in Uganda, between 1951-58. He proceeded to Rome where he did a BA, Philosophy, between 1958-63. He studied social ethics at Woodstock Oxford (UK) and a MA (Philosophy) at Fribourg in Switzerland in 1963.



Prof. Nyasani: "I have been in the profession longer than the university."

From 1964-69, Prof. Nyasani attended the University of Cologne in Germany and got a Phd in Philosophy and History. He studied at Law School, University of Bochum, from 1969-70.

In May 1970, he joined University of Nairobi as a Tutorial Fellow where he was confirmed as Lecturer in September 1971. In October that year, he applied for leave of absence from the University and went to United States where he took

a job with United Nations headquarters in 1971.

He worked in the Department of Political and Security Council affairs, disinformation division. He was the first African to work in the Division. While in the States, his ambitions never ended with working alone.

He embarked on a Master of Laws Course at the New York University School, which he obtained in 1973.

Upon his return to Kenya

in 1974, he was re appointed as a Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University where he has served to date. He has risen in ranks as an academician and an administrator. In 1987, he was appointed Associate Professor and Chairman of the Department of Philosophy.

Prof. Nyasani's career as a journalist dates back to 1963 when he was a student in Germany. "I combined studies and broadcasting and paid for my tuition at University", he said. He worked for radio Deutsche welle (Voice of Germany) as a Senior news editor and broadcaster for Africa English service. Prof. recalled with nostalgia, his experiences as a journalist in Germany. He recalled that among other people he interviewed were Charles de Gaulle, then President of France. He said he gave coverage to Malawian President, Kamuzi Banda upon his visit to Germany in 1964. He further recalled having reported on Mr Walter Scheel, then min-

ister for Development economic co operation, who later became President of Germany.

Still in the 60's, Prof. reported American President J.F. Kennedy's visit to Cologne. Other personalities he interviewed and reported about include Moise Tshombe, then Prime Minister of Congo, way back in 1965.

The academic commitments notwithstanding, Prof. Nyasani has until recently been active in the journalism profession. "I have been in the profession longer than the University", he said adding that he hold an International Press card. He said he enjoyed the profession because it is a career and a hobby. Until recently, he has been reading news for both radio and television.

On how he has managed to combine this role with University work, he said he could read news at 7.00am, 1.00pm and 9.00pm, the times when he is less needed for academic duties. He conceded that journalism and teaching shared the concept of communication. "There is intimate linkage..." he noted and said that at no time had journalism ever conflicted with his academic duties. He said the two roles were aimed at improving the quality of life of an individual and the welfare of mankind. As a Philosopher, his area of specialisation is metaphysics and logic. There is a correlation where evaluation of statements was concerned, he said.

On his new office, he commended the work by his predecessor, Prof. Mutungi whom he said had put the College to a sound footing. He said his was an open door policy where students were free to come, consult and air their grievances without resorting to grumbling.

He recommended maintenance of department students Associations as Institutions of airing their views. He argued that for an effective grass root representation, such Associations should work under the umbrella and guidance of the College on to the entire University leadership. With a student population of over 7,000, the College is the biggest in the University of Nairobi. The Principal is the academic and administrative chief of the College.

Acorn changing special lives

BY SUSAN KASERA

"I know I'm Somebody, Coz God Don't Make No Junk".

A poster with these words hung right in the centre of Acorn Special Tutorials. As the name suggests, Acorn Specials Tutorials caters for very special children, children who are mentally handicapped. Yet this does not mean they are junk.

Few people are aware of this special school mainly because there is not a signpost to suggest its existence. Furthermore, the classroom is Mrs Eva Nyoike's livingroom in Golf Course, a suburb estate in Nairobi.

The school currently has only nine children. Why such a small number when it is obvious that there is quite a high demand for such places? "Well, these children require very special and personal attention. The more they are, the less attention I can be able to give them", replies Mrs Nyoike who runs the school. Getting a conducive place for the school has also proved to be a lot more difficult than Mrs Nyoike first imagined. This has forced her to turn her livingroom into a class and live up-

stairs with her husband. This lack of adequate space also makes it difficult for Mrs Nyoike to enroll a large number of students especially since these children need lots of space.

Mrs Nyoike has always had an interest in special children. This led her to pursue a degree in special education and psychology at the Lock Haven University in America. Her assistant, Margaret Wambui, though not formally trained has had experience in dealing with special children from other such schools.

The children of Acorn Special Tutorials have quite a full timetable. Apart from the usual reading, writing and drawing exercises, they have lessons in self-help speech, concentration, and attention. Mrs Nyoike says she tries her best to offer her children an all-round education and training.

Nothing in their classroom can be taken for granted. For example, the different types of house plants are not there for purposes of brightening up the class only. No, the children take turns at watering them and this way, they learn how to care for things. Mrs Nyoike recalls

with a smile two of their rabbits, who unfortunately died. The children used to feed and care for them, all as part of their training.

The physical games are also specifically chosen to help the children in one way or another. Apart from a sandpit at the back yard, there is also a swing. This, Mrs Nyoike says, helps them to develop their sense of balance and co-ordination. Their timetable includes other physical activities like swimming which they have once a week at the Kenya Railway Club.

Swimming also helps with their balance and co-ordination. Music and movement is specifically slotted in their timetable as dancing helps to show whether the children can follow directions. This already packed timetable further has co-ordination, arts and crafts, using the potty and dressing.

Since lunch is provided, this gives Mrs Nyoike an opportunity to teach her charges how to eat. With lunch over, it is usually time to brush their teeth. This explains the toothbrushes that can be seen lining up one side of the classroom's wall.

These children need to work with

an occupational therapist and one comes in every four days a week for two hours. If need arises, the therapist visits the home of the child who requires extra help. She is mainly concerned with the children's concentration and attention, and takes care of their physiotherapy.

Asked how much she charges the parents to enroll a child into her school, Mrs Nyoike says each parent pays whatever they can afford. "I can't send a child away because her parents can't pay a certain amount", she said.

Acorn Special Tutorials has but one aim, and that is to tutor each child until he or she is able to join normal schools. Mrs Nyoike fears that if the children go to special schools all their lives, they will always be isolated yet if they attend normal schools they will have a chance to mingle with other children.

Acorn is the very small seed from which an oak tree grows. The name Acorn Special Tutorials is therefore symbolic of the little effort that Mrs Nyoike puts into these special children from which they can grow from strength to strength.