

DIVERSITY IN UNIVERSITY

BY DR. J. N. KARANJA,
VICE CHANCELLOR,
UNIVERSITY OF
NAIROBI.



The average citizen of today has very hazy ideas of what a University is and what it ought to be, of its proper place in the general organization of education, of its function in the articulated mechanism of natural life as a whole and its potential capacity to influence and direct the larger national movements in ideas, imagination and spiritual aims.

It is therefore imperative that a clear exposition of our goals be made and made often and explained fully to the wider public. Given the rising demand for accountability in universities, the very legitimacy of the Institution may hinge on its willingness and sincerity in providing specific goal statements for its various constituencies. As those formally entrusted with the reins of power, administrators must bear the burden of responsibility for clearly identifying the goals of the institution.

We offer a complex of qualities useful to society, but we will not be wise to claim uniqueness, nor a higher standard of performance than honesty allows. We provide for the highest levels of professional education, and for the preparation of an intellectual elite. We give to

many other students some of the preparation of the mind, and the intellectual tools which will enable them to respond flexibly to the varied needs of working life.

We provide a home for basic research and it is probably rather efficient to link it to teaching — the diversity of tasks can sustain a liveliness which would be lost in a specialized research institution.

Finally, we offer a service to the memory of civilization, and as the guardians of high standards of intellectual rigour and of quality of exposition.

As the country has developed the demand for University places has increased. The demand on education has been more and not less. The University of Nairobi, in responding to this demand has opened its doors to a very large number of students. If there were no other problems, this astonishing growth would, by itself, result in almost intolerable strains on any institution of higher learning.

It is also true that both parents and students regard the acquisition of a university degree as a passport to the good life and every effort is made to gain a place in the University, even though as it often is the case, many of the students lack the motivation and drive to benefit from a university education.

Rural development encompasses but goes much beyond the increasing of agricultural output and productivity. It requires extensive development of the village, including the extension of health and educational services, expansion of rural trade and commerce, organisation of cooperatives, the creation of local industries for processing of agricultural products, the improvement of housing, of water supply,

sanitation, roads, etc.

In short, rural development requires large scale investment of human and financial resources in both agriculture and development of related activities. And here the most difficult problem is the identification, the education, training, and motivation of the human agents needed to head, manage, and direct rural transformation. Through our varied faculties such as Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine, Human Medicine, Architecture, Science Education, etc, the University plays strategic and central role in this field of national development.

By re-arranging our curriculum, by emphasising new requirements in our staffing and by redirecting and reorganising of our research enterprises and, above all, by our spirit of cooperation with our Government, we do play a significant part in this rural sector which manifestly commands a high priority. We provide the greatest reservoir of experts in almost every field and the talents available here ought to be fully used before we import experts from abroad.

Naturally, the University cannot dissipate its meagre resources by trying to be everything to everybody. Our particular function, I wish to emphasise again, is the advancement of knowledge and of human welfare through the cultivation of reason and through free inquiry and dialogue. But since genuine freedom involves responsibility, the pursuit by the University of its fundamental task should always be inspired and sustained by a deep sense of dedication.

The pursuit of knowledge in the modern world, however, needs vaster and vaster resources, material, human and financial.

The University Grants Committee Report of 1971 effectively charted the

growth, the admissions and the enrolments for the University and for Kenyatta College for the period 1971-1974/5. No similar plans exist for the period 1974 to 1978, but the National Development Plan for this period does state the target enrolment for the University.

The current level of enrolment stands at 5,023 undergraduates and 462 post-graduates. Under these Development Plan target figures the respective enrolments four years hence would be 4,725 undergraduates and 379 post-graduates, an overall reduction of 381. The seeming reduction is in fact largely explained by the proposed transfer of the Faculty of Education to Kenyatta University College.

As I have stated often, the University is a corporate body, comprised of the teachers and students. There is, rightly, immense interest in the public in what goes on there. Any incident that happens there is widely reported. It would be wrong to hide that there have been incidents of lawlessness and display of bad manners by some of our students. These incidents we have always deprecated and deplored and disciplinary measures have been taken by the University. But contrary to some headlines and editorials the majority of our students have gone on with their work normally and with steadfastness of purpose. They are fully conscious of the need to uphold the good name of their University and it is the duty of the Council and the Senate to protect them from harassment by a minority that is bent on wrecking or retarding their academic progress.

We are all agreed that student participation in the governance of the University is essential and desirable. It is up to the students to organize

16. Mambo April 1975.

DIVERSITY IN UNIVERSITY

Continued from page 15

themselves in responsible and representative manner and they shall find that the University Administration will respond positively.

It is not good enough to have talent or ability. You must also have motivation and goals and students must accept the rigorous discipline of academic pursuit because only in this way will they find reward in the University education. We all need nerves and good sense. Student power will not solve financial problems or reduce the effects of inflation. Hard work and unflinching sense of realism is what is required of all of us — students and teachers alike.

If the University as an institution is to be open to all points of view, certainly those of us in it must ourselves be open to new ideas; we must not be afraid of being wrong.

Openness of mind, a willingness to trust, also

imply — require, I think — more than a little humility. Recognizing the limitations of an institution represents, if you will, institutional humility; recognizing our limitations as terribly fallible human being represents that personal humility without which no real learning can occur and precious little, if any, development as a person.

And then, for me at least, closely associated with humility, and equally necessary for survival, is a sense of humour. If we were to take ourselves so seriously that we failed to see the ironies and even absurdities that abound, and not to take at least some limited enjoyment from them, I would worry greatly about us.

The crucial question is; are we succeeding in our mission? I really believe that we are. I know for sure that we are doing our best to create a University here in Kenya that

is a credit to this great nation.

I would like to sound a note of warning. Too much is being expected of education, particularly of University Education. We have come to see education as being in our day, the key to so many of our social and economic, as well as our psychological problems. We expect education to cure all our problems. This is why there is so much disillusionment with the educational system because it has not done or fulfilled many of the things that people want it to do or was promised.

I do not really believe that the value to the Nation of the University and of University education, or any education, can be measured in terms of productivity or cost effectiveness and, all those other managerial metaphor. The benefits will be realized by posterity and may not be immediately visible.

As all of you know the debate on the University of Nairobi has tended to produce

more heat than light. There is no other national institution that has attracted more attention than the University. This is all very welcome.

But to our critics I say this: Come to the University and see for yourselves what we are doing, instead of criticising from a distance, whether in the privileged precincts of Parliament or in the Press. Do not assert what you do not really know and above all, don't be abusive and derogatory. Please do not institutionalize hypocrisy or behave like the proverbial Pharisees. Informal and trenchant criticism or fair comment are helpful, but total condemnation is both cowardly and useless. Judge us by the results and not by rumour and heresy.

All of us, including the M.P.'s and the Press, have a duty to educate the public by telling them the truth, instead of name-calling and engaging in excessive and extravagant verbal violence.