



Research and Extensions Directorate

**Conference Report on The 1st Biennial
Conference on the Status of Higher
Education in Kenya**

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1. Introduction

The 1st biennial Conference on status of higher education in Kenya was an exceptional event in the history of higher education in Kenya. The conference was held at Kenyatta University, Nairobi from August, 22nd – 26th 2016. The conference was organized by the Commission for University Education in Kenya in partnership with TVET and NACOSTI. The pre-conference theme was *"Status of Higher Education in Kenya"* while the conference theme was *"Advancing Africa's Development through Science, Technology and Innovation"*

The sub-themes that were discussed on day 1 and 2 during the conference were Status of Higher Education in Kenya, evolution, strides and challenges facing the University and TVET sector in Kenya, building a Globally Competitive Higher education sector in Kenya and Africa, quality of postgraduate research training in Africa, the role of research in policy formulation and National Development and Sustainable Funding for Research in Africa

On day 3 and 4 the discussions were on engaging International Science & Technology collaborations, Promoting Science & Technology Research in Africa, Translating Academic Research into Innovation, Accelerating Research Infrastructure and Human development, Transforming the Academic Curriculum for Advancing Science, Technology and Innovation, Harmonizing Country to Country variations in Science Policy and Government Funding of Research.

The conference attracted stakeholders in Higher education in Kenya, Vice Chancellors and Principals of both Public and Private Universities, among others.

2. The Conference

The tone of the Conference was set on opening Day which began with entertainment from KU theatre club and peppered with speeches by the Chief Guest, Dr. Fred Matiang'i, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, The CUE chairperson among other guest speaker.

The Chief Guest, Dr. Fred Matiang'i, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, said that the quality and standard of higher education in Kenya should be improved at all costs. He cautioned Vice Chancellors and Principals against



opening several campuses which according to him will water down the education standards in the country. Dr. Matiang'i urged the institutions to work with the government to help ease their financial challenges citing the fact that government has been working on new curriculum development, differentiated unit costs, Open University of Kenya and digital content for schools. Dr. Matiang'i also launched a new report on the state of university education in Kenya available at CUE website

The Vice Chancellor, University of Nairobi, Prof. Peter Mbithi, said that higher education institutions in Kenya should vouch for the world class universities mark. All the institutions need to do is embrace the aspect of internationalization as they benchmark with the best universities across the world, increase linkages with industry, commercialize their research products, increase collaboration with multinationals and get quality assurance and accreditations of their services and programs. Prof. Mbithi urged universities to embrace online distance learning as this will increase access to university education. In order to increase research output, he urged them to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to research. He said, "World Class University needs quality staff and students, accredited programs, funding and technology driven solutions."

That was a hard act for the keynote speakers to follow, but they succeeded and had no problem doing so given their calibre and that of the panelists.

Each day began with a plenary session where all participants gathered for a review of some of the previous day's sessions and described a few upcoming ones. The plenary session key items were the discussion of the day subthemes.

All the participants were absolutely thrilled by the Conference as it was a learning experience for all. Content of the presentations, the questions asked by participants and the discussions made the conference one of the most learning and exciting experiences for the participants.

3. The Conference Proceedings key notes

Note 1: Many students from local universities even graduate without having a personal interaction with a professor. One professor serves up to 98 students. In some academic programs, one lecturer teaches an average of up to 200 students, against the internationally recommended ratio of 30.

"In all categories of universities, there was very few faculty staff at senior lecturer or professor levels. The bulk of staff were at lecturer and lower levels. This is a cause for worry as it means that there are very few academic leaders to mentor scholars in the sector,"

Note 2: The academic staff establishment in both public and private universities stands at 16,318 against a surging student population. Some 8,693 university lecturers have master's qualifications and 656 have diploma papers.

Note 3: Kenya universities offer some 3,408 academic programs. This points to a major crisis with fears that the quality of education may be at risk.

"The resultant capacity deficit means the quality of education may be affected. This, therefore, calls for concerted efforts by the players to fast-track the staff development process," reads the report.

Note 4: Enrolment at public universities had risen from 100,649 in 2008/2009 to over 364,598 in 2014/15.

Note 5: Currently, there are 70 public and private universities in the country. However, the growth has not been matched with resources.

Note 5: Concerns raised by employers and the private sector concerning the mismatch between the education provided by public and private institutions and the needs of an increasingly dynamic labor market. Lack of practical skills blunts quality of graduates

Note 6: Universities had abandoned their core mandate of pursuing academic excellence and become money making ventures

Note 7: The number of students enrolled in universities has grown by double digits in recent years, buoyed by the approval of new degree courses and the setting up of new campuses. Enrolment in both public and private universities now stands at 539,749 with public universities accounting for 461,820 students while private ones have 77, 929. This has put pressure on the government to create jobs for graduates whose number stood at 62,000 in 2002. The high enrolment is also putting pressure on university teaching staff and facilities. In the September 2016 intake the Government will be sponsoring 10000 students to study in private university with the number expected to grow in subsequent years.

Note 8: Universities encouraged to focus more on their areas of specialisation in order to eliminate unnecessary competition and assure quality delivery.

Note 9: Cabinet has approved a Bill for the establishment of the National Open University of Kenya. This legislation will enhance increased participation in higher education at an affordable rate for many Kenyans who otherwise may not afford the time and cost of higher education in the regular, traditionally institutionalized form

Note 10: The regulator that it had discontinued 42 academic programs from both public and private universities for being substandard while three others are being wound up

Note 11: CUE will consider shutting down the program that is commonly known as school- based. Several universities had failed to observe the contact hour rule while offering this program. Trimesters comprises three equal divisions — terms of between 13-15 weeks in an academic year — while quarters comprise four equal divisions — terms of between 9-12 weeks in an academic year. “Universities irrespective of the mode of delivery of learning is required to observe contact hour, be it evening classes, weekend classes, school based or distance learning,” said Prof Some.

Note 12: According to education stakeholders, politics and tribalism are some of the biggest problems affecting education in institutions of higher learning.

Note 13: The commission is also set to carry out an audit on qualifications of students enrolled in various university programs across the country and publish student enrolment data annually.

Note 14: weak and inadequate research capabilities. There is need to have more research funding in universities and to develop more research infrastructures to support the research. Faculty members need to be allowed more time in research work as opposed to more lecture work. Narrow funding for research is also deterring its success. It was noted that majority PHD students drop out of school while starting their thesis. This highlights the need for excellent training in research. Research funds to be allocated based on competitive bidding

Note 15: Translating academic research into innovations a key resource for universities. However it was highlighted that there is need to develop early career programs for researchers and to commercialize research. Sensitization on Intellectual Property is key among students and faculty.

Note 16: NACCOSTI and NRF will work to fund research activities in higher institutions in Kenya and to address Research agenda in Kenya. Implementation of Research Findings was mentioned as a challenge as most research was shelved at the university libraries.

Note 17: VCs to be members of county security committees in counties in which their university exist

Note 18: Cohesion and integration index in both public and private institutions to be publishes by the end of the year. This focuses on fighting ethnicity at the local universities

Note 19: TVEV to accredit certificate and diploma courses offered by the universities. This means that the approval of these programs will no longer be a senate affair.

Note 20: Industry Linkages and Collaboration with other international universities key. Industry should guide on skill required

4. Key action Items for Our University

- ❖ Maintain balance in research and teaching

- ❖ Look at the future “how ready are we to handle 2018 undergraduate students?”
- ❖ Do thing the right way across the board
- ❖ Fit into the Governing regulatory frameworks
- ❖ Develop tools on good governance and professional practices on academic matters
- ❖ Act on internationalization of university education
- ❖ Focus on staff development
- ❖ Improve security measures as radicalization of students is high
- ❖ Senate to account for the enrolled students on an annual basis

5. Upcoming events

- ❖ Chancellor’s convention every year
- ❖ Biennial conference to be held every two years
- ❖ Association of governing council of universities

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