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## General Administration and Infrastructure Development

### **Interesting and Sticky Decisions**

Staying in one institution for almost 30 odd years has its exciting moments, but also its down side. You can regard it as a sense of incredible commitment and loyalty to an institution by a naïve academic or an over-stay because you had nowhere else to go, even when occasionally more lucrative alternatives came your way. You overstayed because there were forces at play that kept you in that poorly-paid job. As James Watson, the DNA Nobel Laureate put in his book, *DNA the Secret of Life*, and I paraphrase: “People stay in academics not for money, because there is no money in academics. Academics stay in their respective universities for other more intellectually rewarding reasons”. According to him, if you want money, the academia is the last place to go looking for it. I entered Makerere University in July 1970 as a freshman of twenty-three years and retired when I was fifty seven years old. Save for the four years I spent at Queens as a postgraduate student on Makerere’s Staff Development Programme and as a post-doctoral fellow at the same university and the three years as Principal of ITEK, Makerere had been my home. All my children except one were born there and left when they were grown up men and women. At twenty three, I was a little older than most undergraduates of today. At that age, most of them had graduated and were probably looking for their first jobs with resumes a quarter of a page long. Most of my children graduated at the age of twenty-one plus. As a new undergraduate student entering Makerere for the first time in July 1970, I was very impressed by the sheer beauty and cleanliness of the place, buildings and the well-manicured lawns. The image of the university’s physical appearance I saw captured very well what people used to call Makerere, “the hill of the learned”. It was indeed the place to be and as students, we were extremely

proud of our university. Sadly, over the years, Makerere took on an ugly façade, as buildings fell into disrepair, disfigured and unsightly; roads became impassable; the once meticulously manicured lawns overgrown with bushes; the perimeter fence riddled with holes; the water reticulation system totally broken down and water-closet toilets given way to stinking pit-latrines which littered the entire campus. Makerere had become a shadow of its old self. You could not be blamed for wondering what went so terribly wrong in an institution that had held much promise for the future. Fortunately, we do not have to look far for the answers. We have already seen the causes and their catastrophic consequences.

### **The Decision to Change to the Semester System**

For as long as I could remember, Makerere's academic calendar was based on a three-term year, which is called a trimester in some universities. The system had served the university well when every undergraduate student was sponsored by the Government and the postgraduate degrees were on the basis of research and thesis, with no taught courses. But times had changed and the once cherished three-term system was now due for a critical review which would usher in a fundamental educational change. The university was now admitting fee-paying students alongside the Government-sponsored ones and most of the Masters degrees were taught degrees, with the thesis or dissertation just being one of the requirements for a student to qualify for the degree. These were some of the major developments which could not be accommodated in the old and rigid three-term system. In fact, the problem had long been recognised during Professor George Kirya's time in the mid- and late 1980s. As we have seen, he had proposed that the university should move to a more flexible semester system. However, after his departure, the initiative lost momentum. Now the pressure was mounting and it was now time to revisit Kirya's idea, but with substantial modifications to fit the new times.

In 1995, we rekindled the debate. Although some work had been done during George Kirya's time and I had been privileged to have been part of Professor Sam Turyamuhika's team, which George Kirya had entrusted with the responsibility of planning for the change to a "semesterised" academic year; more work and thinking was needed to ensure that what was being proposed was workable. Fortunately, we had several Senators who had studied in the USA, where the semester system is well developed. To kick-start the process, Senate set up a Committee, chaired by Dr James Higenyi, the former Dean of Technology, to recommend a suitable semester system that would suit the needs and peculiarities of Makerere University. Dr Higenyi was one of the brilliant engineers on the staff of the Faculty of Technology who had taken his MSc and PhD in Mechanical Engineering at the prestigious Rice Institute in Houston, Texas, which later became the Rice University; so he was familiar with the intricacies of the semester

system in the USA setting. The committee took time to submit its report, but when it did, we were all satisfied with the work done. Like the old Kirya's proposal, Higenyi's committee recommended that the academic year should be divided into two semesters of 17 weeks each. Fifteen weeks would be devoted to teaching and the last two for examinations. The remaining ten weeks would constitute what the committee preferred to call a recess term, which would be utilised for field work, industrial attachments and additional teaching for faculties such as Medicine. In October 1996, Senate recommended that the university should immediately adopt the semester system, which the University Council approved that same year. Initially, not every faculty embraced the new system with the same enthusiasm. Some faculties were hesitant to implement it, partly because the new system was seen as a radical departure from a system they were used to and which they believed had served them well over the years. However, with better explanations and a lot of groundwork on the part of Dr Higenyi and some of his committee members, the new system was eventually adopted throughout the university.

One advantage of the semester system soon became apparent. Unlike in the term system, students had to register, study and sit for the examinations in the same particular semester. The grades earned every semester would then be converted into credits, while the courses studied constituted the credit units. An honours degree was no longer based on a simple average percentage mark, but on a new grading system called the Grade Point Average (GPA). In the term system, students were examined at the end of the academic year, and if for some reason a student missed or failed the examinations at the end of that academic year, he or she would repeat the entire year. In the semester system, students accumulated credits as they progressed. Therefore, a fee-paying student who did not have money to pay fees, could skip a semester to source for funds and come back without losing the credits so far earned and without having to repeat the entire academic year. A student only repeated the semester he or she had missed. Another advantage was that, in the semester system, courses were divided into two categories: the core courses which every student had to take, and the electives which gave students the opportunity to choose from a wide range of courses which appealed to them. Where timetabling permitted, students could take one or more elective courses in another department or faculty. For example, a BA student in the Faculty of Social Sciences could choose to take one or more elective courses at the Faculty of Law, although this rarely happened.

In fact, the semester system is sufficiently flexible, and allows students to retake a paper or papers to improve upon their GPA. One thing we did before we implemented the semester system was to raise the pass mark in the majority of faculties from forty percent to fifty percent. We thought that a pass mark of forty percent was too low. In the Medical School, the pass mark had always been

fifty percent. We made it the standard pass mark for every faculty. The grading of the honours classes was also affected. A first class, which used to start at seventy percent shifted to eighty percent. We maintained the same pass mark of fifty percent in the semester system as well. Another advantage of the semester system was the refund of fees. If a student decided to withdraw from a course after paying the full fees for the particular semester the course was being offered, he or she was entitled to a refund based on a formula that took into account the time the student had spent studying before withdrawing.

One of the significant changes that came with the semester system was the elimination of excessive redundancy that was so common in some faculties which, as we saw earlier, almost forced us to reduce the duration of some degrees from three to two years. In the semester system, the minimum number of credits and credit units a student was required to have accumulated in order to graduate was fixed. In the old system, some students spent a lot of time doing very little, not by choice, but because the courses were structured that way. In my time as an undergraduate, we used to refer to them as penguins. Even some of my friends who were studying in one of the faculties where time for leisure was plentiful took on part-time jobs because they had a lot of time to spare between lectures. In the semester system, students in every faculty had to keep busy nearly all the time. The new system also did away with the very long breaks between academic years, which used to last for almost four months, from June to October. In the semester system, the long vacation was reduced to less than three months, with a proposal to bring forward the beginning of the academic year from October to August, making the long vacation even shorter. So, the length of the semester system helped us reduce idleness in a way, because students and lecturers were kept busy all the time, even on weekends. The course load increased significantly, which meant that students had to use their time wisely in order to concentrate on the increased course load. This also led to increased effective use of lecture rooms, the library and laboratories.

The semester system also made it possible for academic departments in a particular faculty to hire staff from other universities, who would come for one semester or longer to teach, conduct examinations and leave. In the old system, that was rarely possible because the final examinations came at the end of the year and some courses had to be taught throughout the academic year. Another thing that was not possible in the old system but became possible in the semester system was the possibility for exceptionally gifted students to graduate in a shorter time than normal by registering for as many courses as the timetable could allow. As an example, an exceptionally able student could do a four-year course in three years. However, by the time I left the university, I was not aware of any student who had attempted to do that. On the flip side, it also allowed students to progress at their own pace. For example, a four-year course could be done in five. Some thought

the semester facilitated the long overdue curriculum revision and development, which in some departments had become stale.

One thing we quickly learnt as we grappled with all these changes was the simple fact that there is no such thing as a perfect system. Every system has its positive and negative sides and so does the semester system. Since the semester system was new and technically in a pilot phase, problems were inevitable. One problem was that of clashing timetables, particularly during examinations, where students had retakes. Many students had to choose between their current semester course load and examinations and their retake courses or examinations. That was always a difficult choice. Secondly, the two-week break between the semesters was perceived too short to enable examiners mark and release the examination results before the next semester began. In the majority of cases, students had to begin a new semester without knowing their performance in the previous semester, which did not augur well with students, who had to retake courses they had failed. In addition, there were those who thought that keeping both students and lecturers busy all the time was stressful and therefore, counter-productive. Yet, another problem we identified had to do with workload. Since students now had heavier course loads, they were finding it hard to do their assignments. This problem was not new in some faculties, the semester system just intensified it. Even in the old system, medical students used to carry very big course loads on top of all other academic requirements like clerkships in the clinical years. These and other problems meant that the system required further refinement.

The first attempt to address some of these bottlenecks was undertaken in 1999, some four years after it was introduced. That revision did not eliminate all the problems. One of the problems which remained unresolved was the need to offer core courses and electives every semester throughout the academic year. Though this would enable the university to admit students every semester, it had two implications: there would be two admissions a year; and students with retakes would not have to wait a full year to retake the failed papers or in instances where they wanted to audit in order to improve their GPAs. The down side was that this would require massive recruitment of additional staff. Assuming that people with the requisite qualifications could be found, given the kind of funding levels, the university budget would not accommodate such a massive recruitment. The double intake per year had to be put on hold.

The nagging timetable problem also needed addressing to eliminate clashes of subjects and when I left office, we had started tackling it. This and the one stop-centre registration were some of the problems we thought the new Academic Records Information System (ARIS), then under development, would solve. As we shall see shortly, there was also a feeling that perhaps the examination format was a problem. It was well suited to the term system, but in the semester system it was more of a handicap; therefore, a revision was due. As the semester system

continued to gather speed across all departments, interest in using ICT in teaching and learning was also gaining momentum. We saw ICT as the lasting solution to some of the problems which came with the semester system. For instance, many people were advocating the introduction of interactive multi-media facilities in the lecture rooms. The technology would make it possible for lecturers to sit in one room and teach students sitting in different rooms or even outside the university simultaneously. At least that was the dream. On balance, most people thought the semester system was a good idea. No one I talked to before I left the university wanted to go back to the term system. Students seemed to like it and had actually embraced it. Therefore, all it needed was continuous refinement and perfecting. That I left to my successors, some of whom had partly been architects of the system. One only needs to remember that in the life of an institution, change is inevitable. It can be quick or painfully slow but, at the end of the day, everything is bound to change. Very few things are ever cast in stone.

### **The Examination Reform – The Ociti Report**

Ever since universities, and for that matter the entire education system, invented examinations in whatever form; be it in written, oral or practical, supposedly as the best means of assessing what a student had learnt and how well he or she had learnt it, examinations have been under constant criticism, but have survived. It seems the world of formal learning at whatever level is not about to abandon this form of assessment. It is a form of assessment that determines the future of an individual in an instant. I guess this is one of the reasons many students dread examinations. I must admit I was one of those students, who used to be almost neurotic about examinations until I was able to overcome my problem much later in life after the gruelling A-level examinations, which have the power to determine the student's admissibility to a university like Makerere and to a course of one's first choice. Once admitted however, students are subjected to further examinations which ultimately determine the kind of degree they exit the university with, at end of their so many years of study. It was a common saying that in the competitive labour market, the quality of one's academic transcript mattered. I want to believe that most of us are what we are today because we went through those dreadful examinations and, by some stroke of luck, passed them. True or false, I have heard experts in the field of measurement and assessment say that examinations, in whatever form they are administered, are a necessary evil which any education system cannot afford to do away with.

At Makerere, as in every university, examinations are part and parcel of the assessment system. However, as we started implementing a number of academic reforms, some experts warned that reforming the university's academic structures without doing something about the current outdated examination system was bound to undermine the very essence of the reforms we were trying to introduce.

In short, the examination system had to be reformed too. As far as I could gauge, that was not likely to be easy. I had long discovered that in a university, some things were easy to change, while others were extremely hard to change. There were strong forces making examination reform unavoidable. The semester system and the expanded student enrolment were not only the genesis of the examination reform, but also acted as the catalysts that drove the reform process forward. The report of a Senate ad hoc committee, which was chaired by Professor Jacayo Ociti of the School of Education, marked the turning point. Like the Mujaju Report, the committee's report was soon dubbed the famous Ociti Report.

In 1998, the University Senate set up an ad hoc committee and basically gave it two terms of reference. One was to study the strengths and weaknesses of the existing examination system, while the second was to make proposals and recommendations on how to strengthen the examination system and any other pertinent issues. Typical of Professor Ociti, the committee's report was not only critical and hard hitting; it also identified several areas of strengths in the system. The weaknesses highlighted in the committee's report ranged from inadequate preparation on the part of students, cheating of all forms, laxity on the part of some invigilators, clashing examination time tables, late release of results, untrained staff handling examinations and understaffing in the Academic Registrar's Department. As for the strengths, the committee pointed out that, despite the identified problems, the system was run in accordance with the regulations set by the University's Quality Assurance Committee. The committee concluded that, in spite of the increase in student enrolment, Makerere University graduates still compared and competed favourably with those of foreign universities and, indeed, many excelled in their postgraduate studies abroad. As the committee pointed out, Makerere University examinations provided good predictors for the future and advanced academic success of its students. The committee also observed that, contrary to the negative publicity in some sections of the local media, Makerere graduates still commanded a high premium and esteem in the country's labour market and were generally preferred to graduates of other local and some international universities. It also lauded the launching of the pedagogical training programme in the School of Education, which helped staff to improve the quality of their teaching, and the setting up of a Senate Examination Committee as good measures aimed at bringing about the desired quality improvements in the system.

As a way forward, the Ociti Committee urged Senate to continue building on the strength but added the following general and specific recommendations, some of which were far-reaching. The first recommendation was that all students should be subjected to a formative and summative assessment. Secondly, there was need for a better examination management system, to enhance efficiency. Thirdly, examinations had to be subjected to critical analysis by competent persons. The

committee also emphasised the need for timely release of examination results, among others. Among the specific recommendations, the committee wanted to see more improvements in formative assessment, which included coursework as a core component. Besides the take-home assignments, the committee recommended intensification of classroom tests and essays as part of the continuous assessment. On summative evaluation, the committee recommended that each department should produce a test-matrix, which was essentially a plan to synchronise syllabus content and its learning objectives in order for the examiners to set balanced examination papers. For each examination paper, the committee recommended a combination of measurement tools. As an example, each paper could be set to comprise of at least 20 multiple-choice items equivalent to one essay-type question, to measure knowledge drawn from all areas of the syllabus; five compulsory short-answer questions to measure understanding; four essay-type questions to measure the student's analytical and higher order intellectual ability. All examination question papers had to be moderated at departmental level by a departmental examinations committee. Every examination script had to be marked by more than one examiner to minimise bias. Above all, since what the committee was recommending was new ground for most members of staff, it proposed that all teaching staff should undergo training in setting, moderating and marking examinations. The committee also made an important proposal on how to improve the compilation of examination marks at departmental level, the analysis of the results at the faculty level, ratification and approval of the results at Senate level; as well as how to restructure the management and administration of the entire examination system in the university to address the identified weaknesses. The committee was in favour of retaining the external examiners as a check on the university's quality assurance.

In conclusion, the Ociti Committee pointed out that the whole university examination system should be seen as an important part of the university's academic function, and not to be narrowly perceived as just an assessment of students. It had to be looked at in a wider context of assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching staff on one hand, and of the performance capacity of all academic management organs of the university on the other. As part of this initiative, Professor Ociti did not fail to remind us that, as teaching staff, we needed to master approved pedagogical skills to facilitate active and productive learning. Senate approved the committee's report with minor amendments and started implementing the reforms immediately. It was one of the best Senate Committee reports I had ever read.

### **The Main Building – Face-lifting Makerere's Icon**

Anyone familiar with Makerere University is also familiar with its iconic magnificent Main Building, with its imposing tower and clock. This building,

which is also referred to as the Main Hall, is Makerere's coat of arms, so to speak. It also served as a lecture theatre in the past. Professor Mugambi once told me that he studied for his BSc special honours in Mathematics in the Main Building, which now serves exclusively as the university's seat of power. The Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and most of the university's central administration staff have their offices there. It is designed in the shape of a Latin crucifix and sits on top of what is known as the Kendall Plateau, but like most of the university's buildings, it had also had its fair share of neglect.

Shortly before I began my tour as Vice-Chancellor in late September 1993, my predecessor, Professor Senteza Kajubi, had hosted a conference organised by the Uganda National Council of Women in the main auditorium, which constitutes a big proportion of the Main Building. As expected, the women were least amused by the state of the building and decided to do something about it. However, given their limited resources, their contribution was limited to painting the interior of the auditorium. So, the rest of the interior and exterior of the building remained untouched. This once magnificent building was fast losing its beauty and appeal, for lack of a coat of paint and much more! Professor Kajubi had also managed to solve one of the nagging and embarrassing problems of the ammonia stench from the unflushed urinals next to the entrance of the hall. It was the first thing that greeted a visitor entering the Main Building. Besides the fading paint on the walls, the blue wooden louvers which served as windows blinds were also in a state of decay. They had taken a terrible beating from Kampala's wet and humid weather. The result was that they had to be frequently replaced, an expensive undertaking for a cash-strapped institution. We had to find a lasting solution that would eliminate the need for regular replacement of rotten louvers. It was a problem I had not given its due attention until one day, Mr Mathias Ngobi who was then Chairman of the University Council until 1996, brought the ugliness of the building to my notice. Although he had come to discuss issues unrelated to the state of the Main Building, after seeing the deplorable state it was in, he worried that if the louvres were left unrepaired much longer, they would continue to disfigure the building's beautiful façade. Although I was quick to assure him that I would do something about it soon, I had no idea how I would raise the twenty or so million shillings that was needed to fix the problem immediately. In due course however, we were able to raise the money from the university's internally-generated revenue.

The solution we adopted was to replace wood with steel. As there were hundreds of louvers to replace, we knew it would be a costly undertaking, but one that would save the university a lot of money in annual maintenance costs. However, as soon as we started removing the old wooden louvers, mail began to pour in from old Makerere students and concerned Ugandans, protesting and saying that any modification to what they regarded as a cherished national

monument must stop. The mail came from near and far places like USA and Australia. My reply was always the same. I kept assuring all of the protesters that what we were attempting to do was essentially cosmetic surgery. We were simply restoring the aged and wrinkled face of the old lady so she could look beautiful again. It worked. The contractor did such a splendid job. When it was finished, you could hardly tell the difference between the old and new building's look. We had found a simple but elegant solution to the perennial louver problem and proved the critics wrong. With its new blue louvers, the building looked just as beautiful as before.

The second problem required a lot more money which took us time to raise. At the time, the Ministry of Finance was still allocating a little money to the university for capital development, but it was far too little to cover the cost of cleaning the old tiles, re-roofing the building, plus re-decorating and re-painting its interior and exterior. With our usual financial prudence, we managed to save over UgSh120 million that was needed to pay for the renovations from the Government budget and from the university's internally-generated income. In 1997, the roof of this magnificent building took on a new look, with the washed tiles looking their brilliant red again; and the stonework covering the basement which houses the University Printing Press and mail sorting room, among others, taking on the clean bright lustre it once had. Many people, who talked to me later were surprised to see the old building looking so grand in its restored original splendour. Unfortunately, the paint the contractor used was of poor quality, so in a space of few years, it faded and some places started to peel. The areas which were exposed to rain, and were constantly drenched and damp, became a haven for an aggressive form of moss. In some places, the building began to look uglier than before the renovation. I was disappointed and learnt a good, but painful lesson about local paint manufacturers. Cheap paint proved a disaster and it would take us a few more years to raise more money to beautify the building once again.

Meanwhile, there were other problems in the building that needed tackling too. For instance, the chairs in the Senior Common Room had become an eyesore and curtains were also in a near-tatters state, while the artwork – apparently donated by the School of Fine Art – was loosely hanging on the walls. As for the grand piano, it sounded as one that had last been tuned decades gone by. Yet, this was a room where we occasionally held important meetings and other functions. Besides using it as a senior staff café, with the long-serving Boniface Kaigwa as its manager, and an informal meeting place for staff (and occasionally students), the Vice Chancellor frequently hosted small official parties and functions there. It also served as a venue for small committee meetings. Someone once told me that, during the colonial administration, the Quaker community at Makerere used it as their place of worship because, unlike the Anglicans and Catholics, the College Administration did not provide the Quakers with a separate chapel. This once magnificent room was now in real shambles.

Naturally, Professor Epelu Opio, the officer-in-charge of the Main Building, was particularly concerned about the state of the Senior Common Room and did not hide his displeasure at what he saw as our slow response. Even when he kept reminding the Bursar to set aside some money so he could do something about the appalling state of the room, the money was never forthcoming. Fortunately for Professor Opio, things were about to change for the better. Using some of the revenue from the private functions which used to be held in the Main Building from time to time, the Bursar managed to raise sufficient funds to pay for the new chairs, new window blinds and tables. In addition, the walls of the whole room were painted. The artwork was later fixed firmly on the wall with the Senior Common Room looking as good as new.

The old small worn-out steel chairs with their green covers were the most outstanding feature of the auditorium of the Main Building, and they had been there for years. I sat on them for the first time when I entered the majestic building as a freshman in July 1970. However, over the years, they were dwindling in number and their sorry state was very much apparent to the keen eye. The long years of wear and tear had taken their toll, moreso since the Main Hall became a regular lecture theatre for the big classes. Students had vandalised most of them to their bare steel frames. They were an eye sore and an embarrassment to the University Administration. In the absence of funds, the ever-increasing demand for more seats in the auditorium had forced us to bring in a few long wooden stools like the ones found in some rural primary schools, which were a misfit, given the architectural and interior finishing of the Main Hall auditorium. On the insistence and persistence of Professor Epelu Opio, we finally raised some money and decided to replace the noticeably exhausted chairs with new ones. The legendary green steel chairs gave way to modern ones in mahogany colour. The new furniture included a few executive chairs. However, before we could replace the aged, ugly looking steel chairs in the auditorium, our attention was drawn to the absence of a public address system. For every function that was held there, we had to borrow or hire one. Using the little revenue generated on the Main Hall account, we were able to install the first-time- ever public address system in the ancient looking auditorium. The system was a relief to members of staff, who used to teach big classes there. Before its installation, lecturers had to shout at the top of their voices, as one addressing a public political campaign rally, in order to be audible to the assembly of eager students.

As earlier mentioned, the Gender Worlds' International Congress of July 2002 served as a catalyst for more repairs on the Main Building. After our initial disastrous attempt to give the Main Building a new décor, using what turned out to be poor quality paint, this time we decided to go for high quality paint. Only paint of proven quality also known as weather guard paint in the trade would do. It was a point we had to drive home to both the consultants and contractors.

There would be no repeat of past mistakes. Indeed, the weather guard paint lived up to its reputation. It maintained its beautiful and clean lustre up to the time I left the university in 2004. I think James Sempa, then acting Estates Manager, summed it up correctly when he observed that each time it rained, the Main Building looked like it was painted yesterday. However, beyond the ordinary coat of paint, the building required further interior works to modernise and restore it to its glorious luster. Due to the limited resources, the renovation of the building had to wait. On the downside, I was deeply concerned that, due to the heavy teaching demands on the auditorium, the Main Hall was losing the reputation it used to enjoy in the 1960s and early 1970s as a place for high profile public lectures and intellectual discourse. Demand for space and increasing numbers had robbed it of that honoured status.

For those of us old enough to remember, the Main Hall was host to one of the famous battle of wits between Makerere's Ali Mazrui and University of Dar es Salaam's firebrand Walter Rodney, in 1972. It was becoming increasingly difficult to schedule a public function there without disrupting lectures. Even in its dilapidated state, it was also a popular venue for weddings, but even those were getting fewer. Weddings were among the main sources of income for the Main Hall account. When I was an undergraduate student in the early 1970s, we always looked forward to the free dance parties and live band music the Students Guild used to organise there every Saturday night, with loads of girls bussed from Mulago Nurses' Hostel, Nsambya and Namirembe, not to mention the regular ones from Wandegeya, Kikoni and Kivuulu. By the time I returned in 1979, the free Saturday night bashes had long stopped, due to the prevalent insecurity at the time.

There were more disappointments to come, and from that experience I learnt that it was far easier and perhaps cheaper to build anew than to renovate. Soon after cleaning and replacing the broken tiles, some parts of the roof started leaking again. In some parts, the leaks were so bad that the ceiling boards became water-soaked and badly disfigured. It was a re-occurrence of a problem we had to grapple with for a long time. As we shall see later, in January 2004, we organised another donor's conference, the second to be held at Makerere after almost seventeen years. Although the Main Hall was now in a far more presentable state than ever before, the big stage curtain, which apparently was made from high quality and durable fabric, was in tatters and looking aged, and had to be replaced. As we scouted around for a replacement, I was curious to know when the old curtain was installed and whether it had ever been changed before. To find the answers, I decided to make some inquiries. Unfortunately, I could not find anyone who could tell when it was installed or whether it had ever been changed and the last time it was changed or washed. My gut-feel was that it was the original curtain, installed at the time of commissioning the building in the 1940s. For the job, we turned to our architects in the Faculty of Technology who had experience in interior design. TECO helped

us identify a source of high quality material in town and an experienced interior designer. We settled for more or less the same olive green colour, with the university logo embroiled in the middle of the huge curtain. Suddenly, the Main Hall had new décor. With new tables on the podium and new chairs in the Council Room where the sticking nails on old blue chairs had become a real nuisance, tearing holes in peoples suits and dresses, most of the money we had set aside for the renovation of this magnificent and iconic building had run out. A new desk and chairs for the security personnel at the main entrance of the building was the final touch. The Main Building was now looking like an old woman who had just come out of an expensive, but successful cosmetic surgery to rid her of wrinkles and loose skin.

Besides the renovation, the building also acquired a few new things. When I came in as Vice Chancellor in 1993, just a handful of offices in the Main Building had functioning telephone lines, but no office had a facsimile machine. By the time I retired in 2004, almost every office had a working telephone line connected to the exchange through the new intercom – the PABX – supplied by Sembule Electronics Company, a local electronics and telecommunications company. Much as PABX eased communication between offices, unfortunately, the Sembule system gave us a lot of technical problems. We had to replace most of the receiver heads almost as soon as the system was installed. The lesson for us was that promoting local technology sometimes came with an unexpected price tag. To minimise abuse of the external lines, which would translate into huge telephone bills, the switchboard had only two unrestricted or direct external lines, one was to the Vice Chancellor's office, the other for general use. Staff could receive external calls but perhaps with the exception of the Appointments Board Secretariat, they could not make external calls without clearance from the switchboard. Besides the high speed optical fibre telephone lines, the Vice Chancellor's office also had a functioning fax machine and an exclusive fax line. The next major addition was the installation of the Local Area Network (LAN) hooked on the university-wide ICT network, MakNet. For the nearly 60-year old building, this was a giant step into modernity. I recall the occasion when President Museveni teased me for choosing to remain in the "ancient building" when the Academic Registrar relocated his office to the new Senate Building. Then, I had no satisfactory answer beyond telling him that the ancient building represented all that was Makerere. Now, I could afford to tell him with a little bit of pride that, "Mr President, the ancient building is not so ancient anymore, it is now modern and ancient at the same time, and very much part of the cyberspace age".

### **The Sister Chapels – St Augustine and St Francis**

If you are familiar with the geography of Makerere University, you would know the two Chapels behind the Main Building: one on the south end, St Francis Chapel for the Anglican community, and the other on the northern side, St

Augustine Chapel for the Catholic community. Both chapels overlook the Kasubi royal tombs, located on top of Nabulagala Hill, which is some three kilometres west of Makerere Hill. The two chapels are almost identical and as old as the Main Building. Looking at them then, one walks away with the impression that the architect wanted to achieve a perfect symmetry among the three buildings. The two chapels look alike in many ways, but they are internally and externally different in subtle ways. St Francis Chapel adorns an interesting fresco in the form of a mosaic on its western gable, which I understand depicts a scene from the Book of Revelation or one of heroic acts of its patron saint, Francis. St Augustine has no frescos; the western part facing its gable is plain, but with beautifully worked wood panels below which form part of the main entrance to the Chapel.

After giving the Main Building a reasonable facelift, the chapels with their long faded paintwork looked so much out of place that we were forced to do something about them. As the Christians would say, by the grace of God I was able to raise some money and donate it to both chapels, just to do some minimal re-decoration. Unfortunately, the paint was of the same poor quality we had earlier used on the Main Building. Within a very short time, it had faded and flaked with parts of the walls, particularly the St Augustine Chapel, turning black. Thick patches of green moss and algae could be clearly seen on the more damp parts of the buildings, apparently feasting on the rich mineral content of the paint. It was another disappointment and embarrassment, but I did not allow the setback to dampen my quest to make these two magnificent buildings look beautiful again. That opportunity to give them a really good decor came in 2002 during the massive university-wide rehabilitation programme. After the work was done, the two chaplains, St Francis' Reverend Ben Mugarura (or Uncle Ben to the students) and St Augustine's Father Lawrence Kanyike (or Larry to some sections of his congregation) were happy to see their chapels shining again.

Both chaplains were extremely hardworking men of God and their congregation members liked them too. Both were interested in development and did not hesitate to remind me of the need to provide them with space for their projects every time I had occasion to interact with them. However, each man had his controversial side. Ben Mugarura was hugely popular with the born-again students but, to the more mainstream Anglicans, he was leaning too far to the evangelical style of worship. The older and more conservative members of the St Francis community voiced this criticism. In fact, some of them used to complain to me about how Ben Mugarura was turning St Francis into an evangelical church. They preferred the Namirembe type of Sunday service. On the other hand, a majority of students enjoyed his service. He was even able to provide them with musical instruments to form a singing group. The members of the singing group composed and sang their own music instead of the traditional church hymns. For the students, it was fun, expressive and inspired worship in

God. On the St Augustine side, Father Kanyike's problem was his outspokenness on what some regarded as touchy political issues outside the realms of a priest, but he was adamantly unrepentant. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, he would shoot. He was also a frequent guest on Uganda Television. Although I was under some pressure to restrain him, I decided to leave it to him to set his limits of free speech. I was not about to start a fight with a chaplain – after all, much of what he said or criticised was in the public domain. My only concern was that, much as I saw a Bishop material in this brilliant, strong-willed, development-oriented, socially progressive University of Notre Dame, Indiana PhD graduate, who Charles Onyango Obbo – then with *The Monitor* Newspaper – once described as uncompromising on matters of doctrinal dogma, I could see his outspokenness weighing negatively against him if his name ever came up for promotion to the coveted status of a Bishop. Although not as charismatic as the likes of Father Musaala, and his outspokenness which sometimes earned him the wrath of politicians notwithstanding, most of us found Larry a very likeable chaplain. Unfortunately, in my latter years at Makerere, I was a less frequent worshiper at St Augustine Chapel, preferring to attend Sunday mass at Gaba, which was now a Parish in its own right; so I saw less and less of him. The times we would meet was when he was reminding me to allow him expand his chapel or give him a plot and permission to build a new one.

I am tempted to believe that Father Kanyike's highest points as one of the longest servicing chaplains at Makerere was in June 2001, when he used his incredible skills to get the usually rowdy Makerere students – with a reputation for unsavoury behavior – to organise one of the most successful Uganda Martyrs' Day, which falls on June 3 every year, at the Namugongo shrine. To most Ugandans, Catholics and Anglicans alike, Martyrs' Day is a very special event, so the preparation for the big occasion begins several weeks before the day. Some staunch Catholics walk long distances to Namugongo as a mark of respect for the fallen martyrs. Some come from as far as Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and elsewhere, just to be at Namugongo to participate in the event.

Namugongo is one of the suburbs of Kampala where most of the first Ugandan christians were burnt alive for sticking to their new faith. June 3 commemorates the actual day in 1886 when King Daniel Mwanga of Buganda ordered 26 Ugandan christians, 13 Anglicans and 13 Catholics, including the 15-year old (now St) Kizito, to be put to death, allegedly for disobeying him. A week before the celebrations, Namugongo usually takes on a carnival-like atmosphere. Businessmen and women set up food and drink kiosks to feed the hungry and thirsty pilgrims, while musicians do the entertaining. Although the bishops have tried to minimise the excesses of the celebrations, that has not stopped people from spending several days at Namugongo feasting, while waiting for the event. For the Catholics, the climax of the Martyrs' Day is a colourful high mass which begins

with a lot of the usual paraphernalia. It is celebrated on an altar located on an island in the middle of an artificial lake outside the Basilica, specially constructed for the event by the who is who in Uganda's Catholic clergy and attended by almost every high ranking Ugandan you can think of. Sometimes, the President and his wife put in an appearance. Every year dioceses throughout the country took turns to organise it. That year, it was the turn of the Kampala Archdiocese and Cardinal Wamala, one of Father Kanyike's predecessors at Makerere, and other bishops selected Makerere University to organise the occasion. When the mass began, I held my breath and prayed for the best. Given the bad image Makerere students had created in the minds of the public over the years, few people expected much out of them. I guess some of my Lord Bishops were equally anxious and hoping that nothing would go wrong throughout the ceremony. Fortunately, my worst fears never materialised. The students performed beyond everyone's expectation. The singing was beautiful and flawless. At the end of the long mass, Father Kanyike was beaming with smiles and was very happy to thank the St Augustine community for the excellent performance, and proudly signed off as Larry. That was the first time I heard him call himself Larry.

As I stood up to shake hands with Larry Kanyike and a few students that I could recognise in the crowd, I overheard one prominent Ugandan comment on the superb performance of the students that day. He was telling his friend that he had now realised that Makerere University consisted of two kinds of students. One kind was the vocal, savage, vulgar and stone-throwing lot. The other kind, who had performed so excellently on that special day, were the more serious-minded and brilliant students, who represented the true Makerere image as a centre of intellectual excellence. To him, the latter were sadly in the minority, which I thought was perhaps an unfair comment. I guess that was how the public perceived Makerere students.

Father Kanyike had other equally impressive achievements to his credit. He was the first chaplain in living memory to have constructed new buildings at the university, using funds he personally raised from his friends in the USA and elsewhere. As we have seen before, the university gave the St Augustine community a plot along Mary Stuart Road, where he constructed the St Augustine Students' Centre and a separate chaplaincy. Soon after its opening, the centre proved a popular place for social and religious events, weddings, meetings and lectures. Not everyone was happy with Father Kanyike's idea of building a students' centre on a site which had been allocated for a new and bigger chapel. Some said that, by so doing, Fr Kanyike had gone beyond the original purpose for which the university had allocated the plot. Although the plot was allocated to St Augustine community shortly before I took over as Vice Chancellor; in hindsight, I strongly believed Father Kanyike did the right thing. The university derives far greater benefits from a multi-purpose centre than it would from a single-purpose chapel, which essentially would be closed most of the time. The only functions which take place in a chapel

are related to worship. Given the acute shortage of space for teaching, the centre used it as a classroom as well. Another advantage accruing to the community by having the centre as one of its assets was the revenue. The revenue generated from the students' centre made St Augustine Chapel financially less dependent on the university. What Kanyike's centre did not solve however, was the overcrowding in the old chapel, which by all accounts was spinning out of control.

As I had predicted, Kanyike was back asking for more land to build a bigger chapel. This time, he was the only one on the crusade, though he had the backing of some of the university's Catholic heavyweights, Professor John Mugerwa (now deceased) being one of them. Perhaps unknown to Father Kanyike and the Makerere Catholic community, the new request for another plot presented me with a big dilemma. Firstly, much as I was a Catholic like them and therefore inclined to be sympathetic to their request, I had no idea where I could find another plot to allocate to the same community that had been fortunate enough to get one before. Secondly, as the university expanded, the Administration was experiencing unprecedented pressure for space from all sections. Thirdly, the fact that I was Catholic made the situation trickier for me. Even if I would have found a way of spinning Kanyike's request through the university organs, the mounting opposition from some of my colleagues in the Administration made it likely that I could not escape being accused of favouritism and pecuniary interests. Predictably, as we grappled with Father Kanyike's request for a second plot, the Chaplain of St Francis Chapel and one or two other christian groups, including an organisation going by the acronym FOCUS, also put in requests for plots. By now, the whole thing was increasingly turning into what seemed to be a domino effect, and became more complicated to handle.

Perhaps little known to most of the Makerere community, before Uganda's independence in 1962, the British Protectorate Government had gazetted most of the land between the far northern end of the university beyond the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Bwaise Township on the Kampala-Gulu Highway for university development, but did not compensate the land owners. In fact, some of the junior staff quarters are located there. As a solution to the mounting pressure for land for churches, a colleague came with what I thought was a brilliant solution. He suggested that any religious group asking the university for land should be given the option to accept a plot in this gazetted area provided they were in position to compensate the land owners. Unfortunately, there were no takers. None of the religious groups had the kind of money to pay off the landowners who had by now constructed permanent and expensive properties on the gazetted land. What seemed to be a brilliant solution had fallen flat on its face.

In spite of Father Kanyike's repeated reminders and a series of audiences with the St Augustine leaders, we failed to find an acceptable solution. At the same time, the St Francis community was turning up the heat too. Reverend

Ben Mugarura wanted a plot to build what he called a multi-purpose students' centre to serve, at least in part, as a hostel. He had in mind the plight of the poor female private students who had to look for cheap accommodation in places that were likely to expose them to danger. After a lengthy approval process, the University Council finally allocated St Francis Chapel a plot, also on Mary Stuart Road, adjacent to the St Augustine Centre. While Kanyike's request went cold, the hurdle Ben Mugarura had to surmount was to raise sufficient funds to finance the construction of a hostel in a relatively short time. As part of the fundraising drive for his project, Reverend Mugarura organised a series of high profile events, including an auction, which was held in the University Freedom Square and attended by President Yoweri Museveni and the former Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, His Grace Livingstone Mpalanyi Nkoyooyo, among others. That auction brought in some money, but not enough to construct a three-storey building. In fact, his first fundraising function over which I presided was held at Kampala Sheraton Hotel, but was poorly attended. Nevertheless, it marked the beginning of a serious fundraising campaign. I used to attend most of these fundraising functions, partly in my capacity as Vice Chancellor and also on behalf of my late father who was born an Anglican, but had long stopped practising until a few years before his death in 2003 when we asked him if he minded being counselled by a good Anglican priest to take care of his spiritual needs in the twilight of his life, and prepare him for his final journey to his Maker. The old man accepted to be counselled and prepared for his last lap. I approached Reverend Ben Mugarura and asked him if he could help me do it. He was more than willing to counsel and re-instruct him in the catechism. He also promised to look for a bishop to confirm him as, at 96, the old man could not remember whether he had been confirmed before or not. After a series of instructions, and language barrier notwithstanding, he was ready for confirmation. Retired Bishop Lucas Gonahasa, formerly Assistant Bishop of Kampala Diocese, confirmed him in 2001 at a short private ceremony held in the Vice Chancellor's Lodge. From then on, Reverend Mugarura became my father's spiritual counsellor.

One thing I admired about Uncle Ben was his confidence and determination to succeed against all odds. He never relented in his fundraising drive, despite the small inflows from most of his fundraising events. The money he was raising from all this effort was still far too short of the minimum the University Council required for him to start the project. In fact, some of us had despaired and considered throwing in the towel, but for Mugarura, it was God's calling that kept him going despite the setbacks he experienced on the way. When they realised that their chaplain was dead serious about his project, the St Francis community started throwing its weight behind him. Besides the cash donations, some members of the community pledged to offer their professional services free-of-charge and before long, the architectural drawings, were ready. However, the problem of insufficient funds persisted and threatened to stall the project. After a series of meetings with

the University Administration, we agreed the best way to help Reverend Mugarura move his project forward was to take it out of the normal University bureaucracy and run it as a turn-key project, with the Estates Manager doing the over-sight on behalf of the University Council. The trick worked. After the University Council had approved the architectural drawings, it was time to cut the sod and lay the foundation stone, which the President of Uganda performed in 2002. Actual construction began in 2004, shortly after I retired from the university. Although I was not invited to the opening ceremony, I am sure it was Reverend Mugarura's crowning moment – a lifetime dream fulfilled. It is an impressive modern building and another addition to the beauty of the campus. As one of the famous French chemists, who discovered the structure of the benzene molecule once said, "Let us learn to dream" and if I may add, "have the will to realise our dreams"; no doubt Reverend Mugarura was able to realise his dream before it was time for him to retire. Reverend Mugarura set a record future St Francis chaplains may find difficult to beat. I guess what the man of God did for the university was the best form of praising and worshipping the Lord.

Although I was beginning to forget about Father Kanyike's request for another plot for a new St Augustine Chapel, he was not ready to give up reminding me. During the several meetings I held with him and members of the St Augustine community, we explored ways of squeezing the new chapel within the remaining part of the plot on the Mary Stuart Road. We realised that the space available was grossly insufficient for a chapel with a sitting-capacity of 500 or more. In fact, none of the subsequent proposals we came up with seemed to satisfy Father Kanyike. As a final solution, Professor Epelu Opio proposed to allocate them a plot on the western side of the Observatory Hill, next to the Faculty of Technology. It was one of the few places where free land was still available. The plot had one big problem though; it was on a slope, and therefore, additional money was required to pay for the excavation and levelling of the ground before laying the foundation. Father Kanyike did not have the extra money, so that offer was turned down. However, before Reverend Mugarura had collected enough funds from his fundraising drives to begin constructing his centre, Kanyike floated the idea of asking him to swap plots. I advised him to discuss it with his colleague and find out whether the idea appealed to him. Kanyike's proposal was a non-starter. Uncle Ben was not about to give up his hard-earned plot, period. So, Father Kanyike was back to square one, as it seemed we had exhausted all options. Stuck, he decided to revisit his original proposal of expanding the existing chapel. We had looked at this option before and discovered that at some point, the Government of Uganda had proposed to gazette the Main Building and the two chapels as national monuments and architectural heritage. For that reason, we were under obligation not to make substantial modifications to any of the three buildings without the permission of the Government Department of Antiquities. However, when the new University Council began work in December 2002, with Mr Gabriel Opio as its Chairperson, we decided to examine the expansion of the

existing St Augustine Chapel afresh. We discovered that the idea of turning the Main Building and the two chapels into a national heritage site had not progressed far. Secondly, the architects had advised that it was possible to alter the existing building without necessarily changing its architectural character to any significant extent. We now had a solution which had eluded us for such a long time. In spite of some initial misgivings and apprehensions some of my senior colleagues had expressed, the University Council approved Father Kanyike's proposal to expand the chapel in 2004. The approval came as a relief, not only to me, but also to Lawrence Kanyike, who had been keeping the money for a long time and unable to give an account to his friends in the USA, who had given him most of it. In addition, during all this time, Father Kanyike was also under pressure from his superiors, Father Obunga (now deceased) being one of them, to build a bigger chapel. Mr Gabriel Opio felt relieved too. That was my final act as Makerere's Vice-Chancellor. I was pleasantly surprised to enter a much larger and more beautiful St Augustine Chapel when I visited the university sometime in 2006. Father Kanyike had delivered on his promise. The expanded chapel looked very much like the old one. When he was suddenly taken ill shortly after a morning mass in 2003, and had to be rushed to Nsambya Hospital almost unconscious, we had feared the worst but prayed hard that the good Lord would spare him to complete his mission at Makerere. Apparently, St Peter was not yet ready for him. He was spared an early departure and was not only able to expand the old chapel, but also to give it a beautiful make-over. That was a record future chaplains would find hard to beat.

Aside from face-lifting the chapels, another nagging problem was the sorry state of the parking lot in front of St Francis Chapel and the access road from Mary Stuart Road to the two chapels. They were all riddled with potholes of all sizes and shapes. The daily heavy traffic to the Faculties of Arts and Commerce, before the latter moved to Nakawa, compounded the already bad situation. The Estates Department had done enough of the patching. No sooner had they patched the road than the potholes reappeared, so a permanent solution was what we needed. Since the Government was no longer funding the university's capital development budget anymore, we had to turn to our own internally-generated resources. We combined effort with the Faculty of Arts, re-sealed both the access road and the parking lot. Unfortunately, by the time I was leaving the university, the old problem was already showing signs of a comeback. That is always the problem with old infrastructure. Unless you do a complete overhaul, whatever solution you implement seems to be patch-work. In this case, the access road and the parking lot needed reconstruction. That was the costly way of doing it, and we did not have the money to do it that way.

Limited resources notwithstanding, we were able to build a staircase which joined St Francis Chapel to the parking lot below. Because the job took a long time to complete, I began to read critical letters in the local English dailies, which

I thought were uncalled for. Apparently, they were written by angry worshippers who had had the misfortune of walking down the uncompleted staircase, stumbled, fell and perhaps as a result sustained some injury in the process. They were apportioning blame to University Administration for negligence and for failure to complete the job. As usual, the authors of those letters never bothered to find out why the work was proceeding slowly. Instead, it was the usual “let’s expose them” mentality at work again. The problem why the work on the staircase was slow was mainly a cash flow problem. While the University Administration was picking up the bigger portion of the bill, St Francis Chapel was also making a financial contribution to the project, but the money was coming in trickles. Luckily, in the end we were able to complete the job to the satisfaction of all. When the staircase, which in my view made it easy for the brides to work their way up the chapel without the risk of stumbling and falling, was completed, I never saw a single article in the newspaper columns commending the University Administration or Chaplain Ben Mugarura for completing the job. Perhaps I was expecting too much from the ever cynical and skeptical press. It also reminded me of what I had heard some journalists say before: “when a dog bites a man, it is not newsworthy; but when a man bites a dog, it is.”

### **Infrastructure Development and Some Administrative Milestones**

Several people have asked me that if I were to name one of my most important achievements during my long tenure as Vice Chancellor of Makerere University, what would it be? I must say I have always found that question difficult to answer. First, to do so could be construed as blowing my own horn, so clearly I would be the last person to talk about my achievements. Secondly, what I may consider outstanding may not necessarily be so. Thirdly, for better or for worse, I am inclined to believe that during the ten or so years I was Vice Chancellor, Makerere University underwent a lot of changes. Perhaps it saw more changes than ever before in its long history. They ranged from the very small and insignificant ones to the more serious innovations. That makes it that much harder to pinpoint which one was the most significant. Nakanyike Musisi and Nansozi Muwanga captured most of the significant changes at Makerere in their book, *Makerere University in Transition, 1993–2000: Opportunities and Challenges*. Therefore, I will not attempt a repeat here. Having said that, there were indeed some notable changes one could name. For instance, the change from the old and inflexible term system to the semester system and the accompanying curriculum reforms, even in those faculties that seemed unwilling or were not ready to change, was a momentous event.

Raising of the pass mark from forty percent to fifty per cent in all faculties in all faculties, the examination reforms, the evening and external degree programmes and the private students’ scheme, clearly stand out as monumental

changes in the history of Makerere University. Time and again, we had been criticised for overflowing the university with too many students, which to some has had a negative impact on quality. The answer which I have repeated elsewhere in this account has always been simple: What kind of quality was Makerere maintaining when students went through a full academic year without textbooks; when practical classes had to be cancelled because of lack of chemicals and other inputs; when the University Library hardly had new books and journals and the bulk of the teaching staff were Graduate Fellows and Teaching Assistants?, just to mention a few problems the university faced in those hard times?

I also regard as significant achievements the improvements in the staff and students' welfare, which for the first time saw the introduction of a non-contributory and self-financed retirement benefit scheme for staff – a university-financed Staff Development Fund which has helped hundreds of teaching and non-teaching staff obtain undergraduate, Masters, PhD and other types of graduate degrees. I consider the now famous Mujaju Report on qualifications, requiring every academic member of staff at the rank of Lecturer and above to have a PhD degree or its equivalent; the improved process and procedures for appointment and promotion of academic staff; and the introduction of the digital library and the ICT revolution, as equally important events that were implemented during my time, some which were engendered internally and some partly influenced by global forces in the Higher Education sector. The staff salary top-ups from the university's internal resources, and the creation of the Research, Maintenance and Library Funds were also equally outstanding innovations in their own right. One could add the numerous new academic degree programmes – most of them demand-driven, as well as the new academic departments and faculties to the list of significant achievement, if we can call them so. The Mass communications FM training radio station and the Security radio network also come to mind as some of the achievements of small and considerable proportions. The new buildings and the old ones which we were able to repair, and the part of the university road network we were able to rehabilitate, are very much the product of the sweat of our brow. The many development partners we were able to attract to the university and who donated so generously to the revival of Makerere as an African centre of academic excellence, as well as the many and invaluable academic and administrative collaborative linkages we forged with universities and other international institutions across the globe also deserve an honourable mention. However, if you really pressed me hard to come up with one achievement I consider the most outstanding, I would be tempted to mention the Senate House. I believe it was late Professor John Mugerwa of Agriculture who first called it Senate House, which later changed to Senate Building. By the time I left the university in 2004, the University Council had not adopted either of the two versions as the official name for the building.

## **Senate House – Makerere’s Second Iconic Building and the Unexpected Setbacks**

The Senate House (or Senate Building, depending on your preference) stands out quite conspicuously as one of the most significant monuments of my time as Makerere’s Vice Chancellor. The reason is not so much because of its sheer size and beauty – at the time the contractor handed it over to the university in 2001, it was the largest non-residential building at Makerere, covering over 12,000 square metres of built space and financed entirely from the university’s internally-generated income; not a cent came from the Government of Uganda or from any donor – but rather, because of Makerere bootstrapping itself. Incidentally, although President Museveni toured it during one of his last graduation ceremonies as Chancellor of the university, by the time I left it was not yet officially commissioned or, as my American friends would put it, dedicated. I am convinced that this building epitomises an era that saw Makerere University dramatically change from a purely public university, almost totally dependent on the Government of Uganda coffers for funding, to a mixed public-private institution. Makerere had been capable of generating substantial revenue and using it to finance its rehabilitation and development. As the famous physicist and mathematician, Sir Isaac Newton once said, “If I have succeeded, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants”. I can also safely claim I was able to achieve whatever I achieved, a list of which includes the Senate Building, because I stood on the shoulders of two giants. My eminent predecessors, Professors Senteza Kajubi and George Kirya, and my wonderful management team. This modern building designed in the shape of letter L with a roof of red burnt clay tiles and a futuristic tinted curtain glass facade, was erected on a patch of land that was once bare, criss-crossed with a myriad of footpaths. In the latter years, it had been turned into an open-air market. It stands majestically on the south-eastern side of the Freedom Square and Main Building. It overlooks the Students’ Guild canteen and the Faculty of Social Sciences. It is indeed a lasting memory to the huge sacrifice the former Academic Registrar, Dr Mukwanason Hyuha, and his staff made for the university. They decided to forego what should have been their hard-earned allowances, and saved the money for the construction of this majestic building. This was totally new thinking which did not escape the admiration of the former Chancellor of the university, President Yoweri Museveni. At one of the graduation ceremonies he was presiding over in the Freedom Square, he pointed to the new Senate House, which was nearing completion, and proudly told the audience how a simple change of policy had worked wonders for an institution like Makerere; and congratulated the University Administration on being far-sighted and good managers of public affairs. Much as I knew that the credit belonged squarely to the Academic Registrar, I could not help feeling touched by the Chancellor’s remark. He concluded his remarks by emphasising the fact

that because his Government had allowed Makerere to admit private students, the university could now engage in serious and meaningful development, using its own resources.

Senate House was built as a multipurpose facility. It houses the entire Academic Registrar's Department and has a spacious conference hall where Senate meets. It has several lecture theatres and other general-purpose conference halls, one of which serves as a student Internet kiosk, and two well-furnished boardrooms on the seventh and topmost floor. The School of Postgraduate Studies – essentially a clearing house for all research and postgraduate work in the university – is also located there. After I left the university, the office of the newly-established post of Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs moved there, taking over the huge Academic Registrar's office. In addition, it has space for letting out for purposes of generating income for its maintenance. Uganda Commercial Bank, which later changed to Stanbic Bank, was the first tenant to move there and it occupied the entire ground floor overlooking Mitchell Hall and Mulago. The building has a modern canteen located on the lower ground floor. To avoid the usual power interruptions, the building has its own stand-by generator. It is also fully wired for both Internet and Intranet connectivity, and equipped with a modern lift, a rarity at Makerere. As soon as it opened in 2000, it instantly became the venue of choice for all sorts of meetings. In fact, I used to tease Dr Hyuha by referring to his department's new home as his "promised land". If you believe in the power of the African gods and spirits, you could be excused for thinking that perhaps Dr Hyuha and his staff were too much in a hurry to move into their building, and so overlooked a few important customs on the way. One such important African customs demands that before you move into a new house, you make a sacrifice asking the gods to protect and give you blessing in your new house. For the gods to pay attention to your request, you must slaughter a rooster and spill some of its blood on the floor for them to drink. The African traditionalists warn that if you ignore this time-honoured custom and fail to appease the gods; you do so at your own peril. They say that by so doing, you are actually inviting their wrath, possibly with very serious consequences. Going by the turn of events that happened immediately after Dr Hyuha moved into his new building, you can assume that the gods were certainly not amused for ignoring them. They did not take too kindly to the oversight. For that mistake, Dr Hyuha's neck ended up on "blocks' abattoir" and the gods did not hesitate to chop it off. Soon after moving into Senate House, the Academic Registrar began to experience problems with his staff. What surprised us was that some of the most vocal staff had just been appointed in one of the biggest recruitment drives the department had undertaken in recent years. The majority of them had very good first degrees, because that was what Dr Hyuha preferred. I recall Professor Epelu Opio constantly reminding Dr Hyuha that the young bright people he had recruited for routine administrative jobs were academic staff material, more suited for teaching than for administrative jobs.

The problems in the Academic Registrar's Department started as a simple complaint about what some staff perceived as unfair sharing of allowances. According to a memorandum their representatives presented to me, the lower cadre of staff were unhappy about the allegedly higher allowances the senior staff were enjoying. The junior staff were requesting for a fairer remuneration system. To me, the solution was a simple one. All they had to do as a department was to work out what they considered a fair system. That was my initial advice, but unfortunately no one was willing to take the initiative to call such a meeting to discuss the problem with the agitating staff or attempt to find a solution. As I discovered later, I was not being given the full picture of what was really going on in the department. I sensed that the issue of allowances was simply a tip off of a far bigger crisis. Apparently, staff had been silently bottling up a lot of problems about the leadership for quite some time. It was now a question of a dormant volcano threatening to erupt. Inability to take timely action which would have diffused the crisis and the unwillingness on the part of the Head of Department to forestall problems added more fuel to the fire. Accusations of arrogance and insensitivity started flying all over the place. Before we had had time to examine the merits of the staff's complaints about allowances and leadership, the events had taken a sinister turn. Members of staff were becoming impatient with our inability to act fast, and were beginning to lose confidence in the University Administration for what appeared to them to be an administrative reluctance to find a solution to their problems. We had to do something about the turmoil that was fast unfolding in the Academic Registrar's Department.

During a stormy meeting between the staff of the Academic Registrar's Department and the University Administration held in the Council Room in 2000 which, for reasons best known to himself, the Academic Registrar failed to attend, staff demanded an immediate inquiry into their grievances and other problems in the department. They suggested that we immediately set up an independent committee to do the job. The Head of Department's failure to attend this crucial meeting turned out to be a grave mistake on his part. I saw many of his deputies, who were being harangued and crucified by their juniors who were deeply disappointed by his absence. He never told me he would not attend the meeting, and I had no idea where he was at the time. All efforts to contact him failed. We even had to delay the start of the meeting, waiting for him, until we sensed that staff were getting really upset. At the end of the meeting, we had no choice but to go along with the staff's demands. We quickly appointed a high powered Committee of Inquiry, chaired by Professor Oswald Ndoleriire who was then the Dean of the Faculty of Arts. After a gruelling and exhaustive investigation, lasting a couple of months, the Ndoleriire Committee submitted a report on its findings and recommendations, which I was satisfied with. This was the first time a senior member of the University Administration had been subjected to this kind of investigation during my tenure. The report made not only grim, but also painful, reading.

Unfortunately, before we had had time to study and act on the report, an over-zealous person within the University Administration had leaked the whole document to the press. *The New Vision* published the entire document almost verbatim. In spite of the fact that very few of us had had access to the report at the time, I was not surprised that someone leaked it to the press. In fact, some pointed an accusing finger at one of the top university administrators as being responsible for giving the document to the journalist who always had a keen interest in whatever was going on at Makerere. This particular journalist was so frequent at the university that some members of staff suspected that the Chief Editor of *New Vision* had deliberately planted him at Makerere for a purpose. As I have said before, I had long discovered that at Makerere, there was no such thing as confidential information or secret documents. But in this case, I was angry, because the affected persons had not yet been given the opportunity to react to the report and its findings. I am sure that the Editor of *New Vision* saw it as a big headline scoop, but to us it was a real embarrassment. However, there was little we could do about it.

Ndolerii's committee discovered too many administrative lapses, elements of abuse of office and other wrong doings. One of the committee's major recommendations was to ask the Academic Registrar to step down in the interest of the department. According to the committee's findings, the situation would not have spanned out of control if the concerned senior managers in the department had attended to staff complaints promptly, which confirmed my observations. Poor public relations and outright bad crisis management also contributed a lot to the problem. The crisis had claimed its first casualty; the embattled and embittered Academic Registrar left a confused and shaken department in its wake. I am sure that even the staff who started it all had no idea that what appeared to be simple demands would lead to drastic consequences that would end in the suspension of the Head of Department and, eventually, his dismissal. The committee further recommended an immediate staff reshuffle, which we had to implement. It was one of the saddest episodes in the history of the university. It was truly one of the most difficult situations, if not the worst, I had ever handled as Vice Chancellor. In fact, it had an unexpected knock-on effect within some Government circles. Some senior Government officials warned of serious political fall-out if we mishandled it. Fortunately, their fears never materialised. After the usual formalities, the report was formally presented to the Appointments Board for appropriate action. The Board, like the committee, went through the findings and recommendations thoroughly and took pains to ensure justice was seen to be done before deciding the fate of the Head of Department. After the substantive Academic Registrar had stepped down, we had to find a suitable person to act in his stead. We chose one Sebastian Ngobi who was then one of the Deputy Registrars. He had a strong professional background in management and administrative experience as a school principal in Nairobi for many years,

coupled with a lot of skill, tact and plenty of luck, which helped him to rally a department that was still in a state of confusion and gave it a sense of direction once again. Learning from this episode, I was tempted to believe that perhaps our foreparents were right. It seemed to me that, in Africa, if you do not respect the gods, you end up paying a heavy price for it.

Without a doubt, Senate House is one of Dr Mukwanason Hyuha's greatest contributions to the university. However, the construction of this iconic building also had its fair share of the all-too-familiar accusations of corruption. As soon as the sod was cut and construction began, several concerned so-called citizens wrote to the Inspector-General of Government (IGG), alleging that they had watertight evidence that the contractor was paying some senior university administrators hefty kickbacks. They were so concerned that the matter had to be brought to the urgent attention of the IGG, to investigate and prosecute the corrupt administrators. To say the least, we found some of the allegations so disgusting and disheartening that I was about to advise my colleagues to stop spending their hard-earned allowances on constructing buildings. I had no objection to people interested in checking any potential mischief or impropriety; what I found most disturbing and objectionable was the frequency of these accusations and the manner and spirit in which they were being made. The overzealousness of these "informed" whistleblowers was turning the IGG's humble request to the public to provide information on suspected cases of corruption into an exercise in character assassination, a destructive practice which was sending the IGG on wild goose chases, moreover at tax payers' expense. As we tried to probe the sources of these allegations in vain, a friend told me that some of the people making the allegations of corruption were actually rival contractors who had competed for the same jobs and lost. I did not want to believe him at the time, but on hindsight, I think his suspicions had some truth. There were just too many allegations of corruption. Fortunately, for us and for the contractors, the IGG investigated every allegation in detail and found no wrongdoing. As a result, I came to trust and appreciate the value of good record keeping. As we learnt from this experience, good record keeping saves many problems. I am almost certain that without the detailed minutes of the Estates and Works Committee, the Council committee that was responsible for awarding the tenders for civil and other engineering works, perhaps some of the accusations would have stuck and some of us would have lost our jobs, and ended up in court or faced worse situations.

Precise minute writing and good record keeping are some of the enduring traditions at Makerere. In his report, the only complaint the IGG raised had to do with the Council's tendency to expand the scope of works after the tender award. He recommended that every time additional works were found necessary, the University Council should tender them out again. As I discovered, in construction – more often than not – extra works are simply inevitable. This is because the initial designs usually omit a few things which become apparent as the work progresses

and, sometimes, modifications to the original design are necessary. The problem with the IGG's recommendation was its practical applicability. We imagined a situation where three or more contractors would be engaged on the same project, each trying to undo what the other had already done. Unfortunately, I had retired from the university before the IGG's recommendation was implemented. As the Senate House project was nearing completion and the funds running low, I was concerned that the University Bookshop Road, which also hosted the physical address of the Senate House and the Students' Guild Canteen, was about to be left in its original sorry potholed state. That would have been a real eyesore and a shame to the university. The contract for constructing Senate House also included a provision to repair the University Bookshop road. However, as a result of frugal project budget management, there was enough money left to repair the entire road, from the University Road to the west to the Pool Road to the east, a stretch of over half a kilometre. When the repairs were completed, it was the finest road in the university. We were also able to mobilise additional funds to repair the equally potholed Pool Road which had become treacherous to motorists. I recall an interesting joke a member of staff made when he saw the contractors busy at work on the Pool Road. He wondered why the Vice-Chancellor had not bothered to ask the many men who drove at breakneck speed along the Pool Road on their way to Africa Hall to foot the bill for the repairs. I guess he was right in some way, but I had no way of catching them or making them pay, short of erecting a toll booth at some strategic place along the road. I was equally sure that for obvious reasons, the Vice Chancellor's antiques would not have gone down well with the residents of Africa Hall either.

### **The Commercial Units – Venturing into the Corporate World, Makerere's Limited Liability Companies**

When Avitus Tibarimbasa was appointed as University Secretary in 1995, he was aware of Makerere's financial woes. Before taking up the post of Institute Secretary at Kyambogo, he had spent most of his working life in the Academic Registrar's Department at Makerere where he had risen to the level of Senior Assistant Registrar and therefore, a first-hand witness to the institution's state of financial hopelessness. In his new role as the university's accounting officer, he was keenly interested in increasing and diversifying the funding sources. In effect, this would be an extension of his thesis for his MA degree at the University of Manchester in the UK, which was on financing higher education. For him, it was now a question of putting theory into practice. Borrowing a leaf from his experience at ITEK, he floated the idea of setting up income-generating ventures to earn additional revenue. He kept referring to these income-generating ventures as commercial units, the same term he had used at ITEK. The University Council accepted his proposal, but on condition that the units would be legally set up as limited liability companies wholly owned by the

University Council. The second condition was that the University Council would set them up for the sole purpose of making money, so once capitalised they had to operate as viable business enterprises. They were therefore expected to declare dividends from time to time. That meant that they had to register with the Registrar of Companies as for-profit business entities under the category of single-proprietor limited liability companies. The University Council would be the sole shareholder, superintended by a Board of Commercial Units, which was one of the permanent committees of the University Council. At the time, the university had a number of service units which had the potential to make money. It was a matter of re-orientating them from purely service units into commercial enterprises. The Guest House, the University Printing Press, maize mill, bakery and the University Bookshop were the first of such units to be turned into commercial units. Later, Makerere University Press and Makerere University Building Unit (MUBU) were added to the list. Mr Patrick Okumu Ringa, a specially-elected member of the Council was the first chair of the Board of Commercial Units, with Mr Tibarimbasa as Board Secretary. Mr Okumu Ringa had joined the University Council on the strength of his long and vast experience as a successful businessman. He was therefore, the obvious choice for the job. Within a relatively short time, he successfully managed to get the Board off to a good start. As a way of minimising delays in the appointment of staff and reducing the red tape, the Appointments Board also created a special committee to handle the appointment staff of the commercial units, with Dr Charles Wana Etyem as its first chair.

In spite of the fact that the university had had a Faculty of Commerce for almost three decades, the concept of commercial units was a totally new idea at Makerere. To those who chose to think in the box, a university had no business with the world of business. In Fact, to many an academic, the word “commercial” was and continues to be a dirty word. For those of us who believed in thinking outside the box, there was nothing wrong with making some money for the university from unconventional sources. With no rules and procedures in place to guide us as to how we could raise more money to run the university, we had to keep experimenting with new ideas, writing and re-writing the rules as we went along. To show that we were seriously interested in seeing the commercial units succeed, we created a new salary scale – the Commercial Unit (CU) Scale, which was different from the regular university’s M scale, and wrote a new set of terms and conditions of service, specifically for staff in the commercial units. Every unit had to meet its salary bill, pay the corporation tax and cover all its operational costs from its own revenue. There would be no subsidy from the University Bursar; only capitalisations and loans approved under very special circumstances. To ensure staff efficiency, all posts – some of which had been hitherto permanent – were converted into contractual appointments. There would be no permanent appointments anymore, and renewal of contracts was subject to satisfactory performance appraisals.

To Avitas Tibarimbasa's satisfaction, most of commercial units, like the Guest House, the maize mill, bakery and printing press performed extremely well. They were not only meeting all their operating costs, they were also turning out good profits which were being ploughed back to expand the business. Admittedly, a few were strugglers, largely because they required far more capitalization than the University Council could provide. For instance, the printing press was a beneficiary of a loan from the Local Donors account in the then Uganda Commercial Bank. This account was opened soon after the 1987 Donors Conference. Because business was good, the printing press quickly paid back the first loan with the requisite interest and went for more. No doubt, Catherine Munyagwa had been a good manager. It was equally interesting to see Simon Sagala, a friend from our undergraduate days, take over as manager of the University Printing Press when Catherine retired in the late 1990s.

The printing press was not the only commercial unit to benefit from the Local Donors account. Likewise, the new Makerere University Press was capitalised with a 20 million shillings loan from the same source. However, for the press, the loan from the Local Donors account was not enough to capitalise it fully. A lot more money was needed, and we had hoped that Friends of Makerere in Canada (FOMAC) would come up with additional money because, as we have seen before, FOMAC had shown a lot of interest in the newly-created University Press for purposes of facilitating academic publishing. By the time I left Makerere in 2004, Professor Charles Olweny had not yet raised the money. The interesting thing was that, although some of the units were limping, they were making some money and not about to go burst. This reinforced our belief that the university could earn more revenue from this source, if only we could find a way of capitalising its commercial units fully. The bookshop, with its unique problems that made it difficult to run along the lines of a profitable commercial unit, was the exception. If I were to pick one commercial unit I considered most successful, I would put my bet on the Makerere Guest House. In my opinion, it was the big jewel in the crown, and for good reasons too.

### **The Guest House – Makerere's X Star Hotel**

When new Mary Stuart Hall opened in the late 1960s and the females moved out of their old "Box", the Administration decided to turn the old hostel into a guest house to provide accommodation for external examiners, newly appointed staff, as well as other university guests. In the 1960s, a wooden wing with a red tiled roof was added to the eastern side of the old small hostel. Then, in the late 1980s during Professor George Kirya's tenure, the British Government funded an additional wing on the western side of the original building. Even with all these modifications, the Makerere Guest House remained a service unit until 1996 when it was re-organised into one of the university's commercial units,

generating sufficient revenue to meet all its overheads, and with a surplus to remit to the university coffers. However, before converting it into a business enterprise, there were several things that needed changing. First, the management had to be reformed in order to make it more professional and capable of running the guest house as a business. Secondly, we had to shed off some of the old and excess staff who did not fit into the new structure. They had to be sent back to the University Secretary for redeployment. These were tough decisions and we tried to implement them as humanely as we could. We also needed some facts and figures to make sure that the Guest House would succeed as a business venture, without resorting to the University Bursar for bail-out. We decided to set up a small committee of experts, chaired by John Turyagenda of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, to advise on the best available options of turning a hitherto non-profit-making entity into a professionally and profitably-run guest house, along the lines of the modern hospitality industry. John Turyagenda (or JBT to his peers) knew a thing or two about running a successful business.

Turyagenda's committee recommended the hiring of a new manager with sufficient experience in the hospitality industry, preferably with a strong background in hotel management. The committee further recommended that all chefs, waiters, kitchen and chamber staff be retrained or replaced with new ones who had the requisite qualifications and skills to work in a profit-making hotel. My initial reaction about all these sweeping changes was apprehension, and for a reason. I was concerned about the many old Guest House staff who had been recommended for retrenchment and the possible backlash from their union. I had learnt the hard way before, when we tried to rid the university of the many unauthorised makeshift kiosks which had mushroomed all over the campus, how unpopular and unpleasant such a decision could be. Much as the kiosks were serving a useful purpose to their owners, a sizeable section of the community was concerned about their impact on the image of the university. They argued, and convincingly so, that the uncontrolled kiosks were not only turning the university into a slum, they had also become a source of insecurity. The Administration was asked to get rid of most of them. As we went about demolishing the ugly-looking kiosks on the orders of the University Council, we met with a lot of resistance. Their owners decided to vent their anger on the Vice Chancellor. Besides the rude remarks, I received threats of physical harm. Suddenly, I had become a very unpopular Vice Chancellor. The reason for the hostile reaction was understandable. Those little makeshift shops were a vital source of supplementary income and livelihood to some members of staff and the community who owned them. In the students' halls of residence, the kiosks had become an important source of revenue in the form of monthly rent collections, in addition to providing the students with convenient shopping. Getting rid of them altogether therefore proved a very sensitive matter. We were only able to diffuse the potentially explosive situation after agreeing to keep a few which met

the University Council's standards in specifically designated places. As second compromise, we had suggested that anyone who wanted to build a kiosk should apply for a plot in the empty space below Mitchell Hall which we used to call the ROKO site.

With kiosks episode fresh in my mind, I was not prepared for a replay of those ugly confrontations. I had already learnt that staff regarded retrenchment as a dishonourable dismissal, so I wanted us to proceed with a lot of caution. As we started implementing Turyagenda's committee recommendations on staffing, I had to restrain some of my colleagues' run-away exuberance in order to contain any potential industrial relations fall-out. On the other hand, the University Secretary appeared to be more resolute in his belief than I was. He was convinced that if such situation ever arose, it could be contained. I had to pray that he was right and that he had the means to handle a staff riot if it ever erupted. However, as far as I was concerned, we were leaving a lot to chance, and this had its dangers; in any case, it has never been a good management practice. We had to make a conscious effort to allay the fears of the affected staff and to convince them that their interests were being taken good care of in the new arrangements.

Good public relations – in other words, using effective communication to manage stakeholder concerns, combined with a well thought-out staff redeployment plan – did the trick. Naturally, some of the affected staff, who had worked in the Guest House for years, were unhappy with the changes; but all passed without serious incident. From then on the Guest House had to operate as a real business entity. At the time it changed status, the University Council was one of its big debtors, and the University Secretary was instructed to settle the debt as quickly as possible. Since he could not raise the money to settle the old debts, the University Secretary suggested doing a debt swap. Other debtors were also relentlessly pursued to pay up. Now, there would be no more free lunches for the Vice Chancellor and his guests. This was to ensure that the Guest House as a commercial unit operated like a normal business and paid its way. Although the debt collecting initiative was not a dramatic success, it made a difference. Even my office that made use of the Guest House regularly had to pay for the services.

The advertisement for the position of its manager attracted very few applicants. I strongly suspected that the poor response was a reflection of Makerere's uncompetitive salaries in the market. Nevertheless, among the few who applied, the Appointments Board was able to identify a suitable candidate for the job. Mrs Rosemary Kobutaagi performed best at the interview and was offered the job. Her previous experience in hotel management came in handy. We were also able to identify a qualified accountant. The next exercise was to screen the former employees to identify who would be retained. All of them had been asked to re-apply for their jobs, but only a few of them qualified for re- appointment. In a relatively short time, coupled with a rigorous promotional campaign, Mrs

Kobutaagi had turned the Guest House into a profitable enterprise. The once service unit was now earning enough money to meet all its overheads, including its wage bill, and making substantial savings. For instance, in 1996 – the first year it operated as a commercial unit – it earned a gross income of UgSh140 million and made a net profit of thirty million shillings, after meeting all costs, including the corporation tax. By 2002, the gross revenue had risen to UgSh230 million. In 2004, my last year at Makerere, the guest house earned a gross income of UgSh528 million and a net profit of almost seventy six million shillings from its forty rooms and other services. In a space of about eight years, the gross earnings had risen by about 270 per cent while the profit margin had also risen by about 150 per cent.

Although the good old guest house had started attracting big crowds of clientele from as far as town, the building and its surroundings could do with a facelift. With good cash flow, the place had accumulated sufficient funds to embark on a serious renovation exercise. The wooden wing on the eastern side facing Lincoln House was the first to undergo a make-over. We decided to pull it down and rebuild it anew in brick and motor. All the money that paid for the renovation, some UgSh180 million or so, came from the guest house's savings. With the wooden wing fully renovated, the guest house was now boasting of some very fine and modern rooms equipped with colour television sets and a PABX connection. The place was slowly, but surely moving out of the Stone Age into something captivatingly modern. The manager had a new and more befitting office in the renovated wing. Avitus Tibarimbasa's experiment had succeeded beyond our wildest dreams and I could not hide my excitement the day we commissioned the renovated wing. A new reception desk was also installed, followed by improvements in other areas. More and more people were turning it to their popular joint and patronising it every evening. Even my children too took a fancy to the place. Now, we had a reasonably priced place on campus for our international guests. My Norwegian friends, in particular, liked staying there. With good food and improved services, the place became my ideal venue for entertaining university guests. The waiters too, in their new uniforms, were a smart lot to look at. In fact, at times the manager had difficulty satisfying the demand for rooms. On many occasions, she had more customers than she could accommodate in her forty rooms. Inspired by that instant success story, we started exploring ways of expanding it with another extension behind the existing building. Unfortunately, when my tenure ended, the idea was still under discussion.

Much of the empty grounds and lawns in front of the guest house manager's residence, the former David Rubadiri's residence, were always bushy and idle. David Rubadiri once told me that he used to sit there with his students to read poems. We decided to give the space to the guest house as an outdoor facility. After mowing the lawns, the green grounds added the much appreciated beauty to the guest house decor, in addition to providing space for outdoor parties. Soon, I was

one of the Guest House's frequent visitors. Besides a health club, the only facility our X star hotel (by the time I left we had not yet applied for a star rating) lacked was a business centre. I had several discussions with the manager on the issue until we agreed to convert an office next-door to the kitchen into a small business centre, to provide the guests with e-mail, Internet and fax services, but at a fee. To that end, I made sure that the MakNet optical fibre backbone was installed and the Guest House was given a connection. In fulfilment of my request, Dr Tusubira of DICTS made sure the optical fibre was extended right to the Guest House, and in no time, the manager was busy mobilising funds to purchase the computers and accessories. Everything seemed to be going well for her, and for us too. Therefore, it came as a surprise when she informed me in late 2003 that she had decided to go back to school to pursue a Masters degree at the Uganda Management Institute. Consequently, she was resigning her post as manager. No amount of sweet-talking could persuade her to change her mind. I was deeply disappointed, not because she was leaving, but because she had done so well in so short a time. All I could do was to express my gratitude to her for an exemplary performance and bid her farewell. Although I never pressed her hard to tell me the real reason for her sudden departure, I had detected a streak of frustration in her. As the Deputy Vice Chancellor used to say, the office of the University Secretary was not giving sufficient autonomy to the managers of the commercial units to run them the best way they knew. It was still exercising control over them as if they were being run as service units. As every good business person will tell you, "red tape and excessive bureaucracy kills business".

The staff clay tennis courts in front of the University Guest House had fallen into a state of disrepair due to years of neglect, and were now an eye sore to the Guest House manager. Lawn Tennis was and continues to be a popular pastime for both staff and students. I know of several colleagues both senior and junior, who really loved the game and were almost addicted to it. Dr John Silike-Muruum, my colleague during my days at the Chemistry Department, was certainly one of the avid lawn tennis lovers. The Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Epelu Opio, was one of the regular players before the chores of the office made it increasingly difficult for him to play regularly. But due to the bad state the courts were in, they had to play on very rough surface until we raised some twelve or so million shillings and hired an expert on tennis courts from the Uganda Lawn Tennis Association to do the repair job. To avoid the continuous degeneration of the surfaces, I had suggested a change from clay to an all-weather asphalt surface. The majority of the patrons opposed my idea because, according to them, asphalt would shorten the life span of their balls. The expert who repaired the court did a good job and, in no time, members of staff were playing their game on a smoother surface. No doubt, the refurbished court with new perimeter chicken mesh added more aesthetics to the surroundings of the Guest House. I had the rare pleasure of playing a curtain raiser game the day the contactor handed the courts to the University

Administration. I had last played lawn tennis at St Peter's Junior Secondary School Nsambya way back in 1963, so you can guess the quality of my game that day. I do not even remember who my more-than-patient opponent was. All I remember was that every time I hit the ball, it went flying all over the place. I remember that Professor Elly Katunguka-Rwakishaya and other more experienced players, who were watching us, kept laughing at my rusty and unusual forehand and backhand strokes as I struggled to put the ball over the net; but it was good fun. My idea after repairing the tennis courts was to open them to the interested Guest House patrons, at a fee. That would be one way of raising money for their regular minor maintenance. Unfortunately, I left before I could sell the idea. Considering the amount of money we had spent on rehabilitating the courts, I expected the users to take care of their rehabilitated facility; perhaps that was my usual wishful thinking – another grim reminder of the fact that in our part of the world, public property is never a public concern.

### **The Good Old University Bookshop Goes Private**

From a purely personal point of view, the University Bookshop story was a sad one. Since the death of Kansiimeruhanga in an air plane crash – when a Ugandan Airlines plane crashed in Rome in 1987, killing most of the people on board – the University Administration had entrusted the management of the Bookshop to James Sewankambo, an old friend of mine from our undergraduate days. Sewankambo was not strange to the world of business. He possessed a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration from the former Institute of Public Administration, which later became the Uganda Management Institute. In addition, he had a person like Mr Ngobo who had transferred from the Finance Department with his wealth of financial management experience. As we have seen before, the Bookshop was originally set up to import and sell prescribed textbooks and stationery to all university students. When the Government was subsidising public universities, each student at Makerere had a textbook and stationery account which was replenished every academic year. Those were the good old days which some of us tasted during our undergraduate days before things went sour. Because all unspent money had to be returned to the Government Treasury, some “smart” students who failed to exhaust the money on their accounts bought novels the Bookshop stocked from time to time and sold them to the street hawkers down town at a premium price. No sane student was keen on his or her money being returned to Government.

During the latter years of Idi Amin's rule and the period immediately after his overthrow, foreign exchange to import books became scarce, which made the process of getting the US dollars from the Bank of Uganda a very tedious procedure. The consequence was unacceptably long delays in placing the orders and getting the books in the Bookshop before the academic year ended.

As solution, whenever the Bank of Uganda released the dollars, the Bookshop manager would travel to Britain to buy the books directly from the publishers and fly back with them. Sadly, Kansiimeruhanga met his tragic death when he was returning from the UK on one of such trips. All the books and the tons of stationery perished with him in the accident. At the time, it was common practice for students to go through a full academic year without a single textbook. As a remedy, the university abolished the old system whereby students bought the textbooks for keeps, and set up a Book Bank scheme, managed by the University Librarian. The change in policy had a profound effect on the future of the University Bookshop. If anything, it should have closed when the Book Bank scheme became operational in early 1990. However, some people argued that it still had a role to play, not as a service unit, but as a business enterprise. Consequently, the University Council decided to keep it open. Under the new arrangements, it would continue to import textbooks as well as other books of general interest as part of its business. The idea was to cater for those students who could afford to buy their own textbooks at their expense. It was supposed to operate like any commercial bookshop. However, as my friend Sewankambo soon discovered, with the poor reading culture of most Ugandans and the stiff competition from well-established bookshops in town, the University Bookshop was slowly but surely doomed to fail. Few students were interested in buying their own textbooks. Besides, they could buy the same books more cheaply from the many Kampala street booksellers. To make matters worse, many would-be customers wanted to buy books on credit and many who were advanced credit never made good their debts.

In spite of James Sewankambo's good intentions, vigorous advertising campaigns and business acumen, the Bookshop was making very little money. The Commercial Units Board had reached the conclusion that, as a commercial unit, the University Bookshop was not viable. To ensure fairplay before we acted, we asked the Turyagenda Committee to investigate the viability of the Bookshop as a profitable commercial unit or lack of it, and recommend the best course of action. The committee concluded that the Bookshop was unprofitable and recommended that it be privatised. The Commercial Units Board accepted the recommendation and tasked us to make the necessary arrangements for its privatisation and the redeployment of its staff. The majority of staff members, including the manager – James Sewankambo – were working there on secondment. It was another difficult policy change to implement, but we had no choice but to go along with the Board's decision. As we prepared to redeploy the staff, James Sewankambo and some of his senior colleagues decided to take early retirement, with their terminal benefits. On one hand, their resignation solved a problem for the University Secretary who had the task of re-integrating them into the mainstream University Administration. On the other hand, I thought that by taking early retirement, my colleagues had made a hasty decision, which in my opinion was a big mistake. After all, none of them

had been accused of incompetence or financial impropriety. It was just that the book business was not a good money maker. Some thought the Bookshop failed as a commercial unit because management had no formal training in running a commercial bookshop. Unfortunately, there was little I could do to persuade them to change their minds; it was their personal choice. In spite of the publicity it was given, the advertisement for the privatization of the Bookshop attracted very few responses. By the deadline, there was only one promising bid from Fountain Publishers – a local publishing house in town. The Commercial Units Board agreed to award the contract to Fountain Publishers at a negotiated monthly rent, but it still remained under the Commercial Units Board, run along different lines. As far as I can recall, it was one of the first partnership experiments between the university and the private sector.

### **The New Home for the Institute of Computer Science and the Controversies**

One of my long cherished dreams as Vice Chancellor was to build a new home for the Institute of Computer Science, appropriately located near the university's main gate. I wanted to give what I thought was the technology of the new millennium the highest visibility possible. As I have said before, every time I visited the Institute of Computer Science in its old and cramped premises at the Department of Mathematics, staff there always raised two issues: inadequate computers and space for teaching and staff. As if I had already identified a source of quick money, I kept promising them that, very soon their problems would be a thing of the past. Frankly, much as I was promising, I had no clue as to how I could deliver on my promises, because at the time I had no idea where the funds would come from for an appropriate building for the institute. As a matter of fact, I was risked being labelled a sweet-talking Vice Chancellor or worse, as it was just one of those many daydreams of mine, nothing more. Nevertheless, I was confident that, one day, we would raise the funds to build an appropriate home for the struggling institute.

In 2000, we realised the breakthrough we had been waiting for. As we negotiated the NORAD-funded Institutional Development Programme, I deliberately added on the long list of needs, a request for a building for the Institute of Computer Science. Convinced of the critical role ICT was poised to play in the development of the university, NORAD approved the request. The long serving Institute Director, Dr Edmund Katiti – now out of office – left the planning for the new building to his successor, Mrs Norah Muliira. When the architects and quantity surveyors presented the bills of quantities, we discovered that the budget NORAD had approved for the ICS building could only pay for four floors. However, the University Council wanted a bigger building. The architects were instructed to add a fifth floor, which the University Council

would pay for. In all, the five floors together amounted to 2,375 square metres. One of the reasons for adding a fifth floor was that we needed a new and befitting home for the African Virtual University. Several reputable contractors submitted bids and after the usual scrutiny process that saw the lowest bidder lose out to the second lowest bidder, due to what the consultants called discrepancies and errors in his bills of quantities, we were ready to award the contract. However, NORAD wanted to be convinced that the university had awarded the tender to the lowest bidder on sound technical reasons, so they commissioned Pricewater House Coopers to investigate. The consultants were able to explain why the lowest bidder was disqualified. NORAD was satisfied and that was the end of the matter, so we thought. In hindsight, I now believe this was a pointer to the problems that were to come later. We then signed the contract for five floors.

As construction progressed, it became obvious that given – the rate of cash flow – the University Council could not afford to pay for the extra fifth floor, so the contractor was instructed to scrap it. Naturally, this necessitated a revision of the contract. At about the same time, Dr Charles Basalirwa who was Head of the Meteorology unit in the Department of Geography was thinking of a new building for his unit, but his budget for construction in the NORAD grant was just enough for a single storied building. During one of NORAD's Steering Committee meetings in late 2002, which I personally chaired, we proposed to put a request to NORAD to allow Dr Basalirwa and the Institute of Computer Science pool their budgets to finance the fifth floor which the University Council had earlier abandoned. Since the demand for space was huge, the rationale was to try as far as possible to stick to the original design. The fifth floor, which the University Council had failed to pay for would now be the new home for the Meteorology unit. Fortunately for us, NORAD approved the request. However, our minutes' recorder messed up. Instead of five floors, the minutes made reference to six floors. Fortunately, the mistake did not affect floor area, it was recorded as 2,375 square metres as in the original design. Unfortunately for me, it was the beginning of the *wahala*, as my West African friends would say, which put me on a direct collision course with the new Institute Director, Dr Venansius Baryamureeba.

Originally a lecturer in the Department of Mathematics, Dr Baryamureeba had taken his PhD at the University of Bergen Institute of Informatics in Norway, which was awarded to him on August 25, 2000 at the same graduation ceremony where the university conferred on me a PhD honoris causa. Since his PhD thesis was in a Computer Science-related discipline, soon after his return in 2001, we decided to transfer him to the Institute of Computer Science (ICS), which at the time was grossly understaffed, as Acting Director. He joined the ICS when most of the planning and the architectural drawings for the new building had been completed, under the direction of Norah Muliira. When Byaramureeba learnt that

there would be no sixth floor and that the sixth floor referred to in the Steering Committee's minutes was an error, he became so incensed that he decided to ask the Inspector General of Government to investigate what he believed was high-level corruption on the part of the University Administration. As usual, the IGG was quick to swing into action. At the end of the investigation, the IGG concluded that the alleged corruption was unfounded, nothing amiss, but the young man refused to believe the IGG's report. To him corruption existed. He had already concluded that the real reason we had decided not to build the sixth floor was because we had pocketed the money which had been earmarked for that floor. Unsatisfied with his report, he petitioned the IGG to convene a meeting of all interested parties, NORAD, Makerere University Administration and him. The IGG obliged and invited us to meet him in his office. During the said meeting, we went over the same arguments and at the end of it all, the IGG said he had not seen any new evidence to change his report. The young man was still adamant. For him, corruption had been proven. Perhaps the IGG had been compromised by the corrupt Makerere University Administration. The young man decided to take the matter higher – to the Social Services Committee of the Parliament of Uganda.

As far as I could remember, this was a precedent. The Social Services Committee was willing to listen and give him audience. After meeting him alone at Parliament, the Committee promised to visit the university to see what was at the heart of the dispute. Indeed the Committee, led by its chairperson, Mrs Dorothy Hyuha made an extensive tour of the ICS building under construction and pored over all documents. The Committee's conclusion was the same as that of the IGG. Nothing was amiss. Although I had been summoned to appear before it and answer the allegations, after the grand visit, the appointment was never followed up. That put the matter to rest, but the damage had been done. The episode was such an embarrassment, not only to the university, but also to the Norwegian Embassy and NORAD. To clear the air, the Norwegian Ambassador, Gjos Tore, invited me to his office to explain what was going on. As far as he was concerned, he did not think there were any irregularities. Being a good civil engineer, ambassador Tore told me what mattered was not so much the number of floors, but the square metres, adding that you could build as many floors as you wanted out of a given number of square metres, depending on the size of the floors and number of rooms you wanted. If those had been altered, then he would have had reason to be concerned. In fact, if we had not acted with care, the project would have been in danger of being cancelled. Much as we all understood Dr Baryamureeba's argument for the extra space and we had even asked him to raise funds from the institute's revenue to pay for the extra sixth floor he wanted, we failed to understand why he pursued the matter so viciously that one wondered if the ICS building was the first we had successfully constructed. Beyond insisting that he needed all the space, because in the near future he intended to introduce many more courses, we failed to understand his real motive. In fact, a friend of

mind told me that when the young man went to contest the 2001 Parliamentary elections, he asked the people there to vote for him because he was one of the few members of staff at Makerere who had dared to expose the corruption in the University Administration. Borrowing a phrase from one of our colleagues in the Bursar's Office which he once used when he was under investigation for alleged corruption in the Finance Department in the late 1980s – “much as the investigators were insisting that I was responsible for the disappearance of a big consignment of beef meant for students, my family neither saw nor ate the meat” – I told the IGG that, much as the young man insisted that he had unearthed corruption in high places, neither my family nor myself ever saw or ate the meat. On reflection I was tempted to believe that the young man was acting out of youthful exuberance. Perhaps he was simply overzealous, too eager to prove a point. But it is also probable that he was genuinely sure he had smelt a rat, which had convinced him that indeed we had engaged in acts of financial impropriety. Whatever it was, perhaps I will never know. However, the consistent figure of 2,375 square metres in all relevant documents saved the day.

Despite the initial disruptions, the contractor was able to complete the five-floor building on schedule without further problems. In January 2003, Ambassador Gjos Tore cut the tape and declared the building officially open. It was an emotional moment for me. I almost broke into tears when he handed me the keys. I remembered how close this beautiful building had brought whatever little reputation I had into disrepute. I also remembered what a joyful moment it had been when, almost two years earlier, Ambassador Arild Oyen and I symbolically broke the ground on Pool Road in a place where Dr Festo Byarugaba's house once stood, to commence construction. I could not help feeling a sense of accomplishment that in spite of the difficulties, I had delivered on my promise. We had come so close to losing it. In his short address, Ambassador Tore, who had replaced Dr Arild Oyen a year or so earlier, remarked that the building had cost far less than he would have expected and it was a good job. To us who had been accused of impropriety, the Ambassador's remark was reassuring. I have no doubt in my mind that the ICS building is one of the most beautiful new buildings at Makerere. It is also appropriately located near the university's main gate in fulfilment of my dream. Shortly before I retired, both Senate and the University Council had agreed to change the name from Institute of Computer Science, which to me was a more appropriate name that encapsulated what the new building stood for, to the Faculty of Computing and Information Technology, with Dr Baryamureeba as its first Dean.