
Tenure as Vice-Chancellor

Anyone who has ever succeeded in any human endeavour will tell you stories of failures and what he/she learned from those failures. A writer and poet Samuel Beckett, wrote the following words, “Ever *tried; ever failed. No matter; try again; fail better.*” Life is ultimately about these failures. They usher in new experiences, exposures and excellences. My intention was to learn from any mistakes I made and make corrections.

In my earlier chapters, I narrated how I became a departmental chair without an iota of experience. I trained on the job and went along past traditions of managing a department. This learned experience became useful during my tenure as a Vice-Chancellor.

My primary and secondary school days exposed me to some administrative intrigues which hardened me at an early age. As a class monitor and prefect in a primary school, I dealt with both teachers and pupils. I gained more experience as a prefect in Kisii High School; I handled rude and undisciplined students who needed favours. I also had to deal with and appease teachers as well as commodity suppliers, some of whom unsuccessfully attempted to induce me into doing those favours. I made my firm decision then to be a young boy of impeccable integrity. I survived those days and excelled in my academic work.

At Rutgers University, USA, I had to contend with students and lecturers from diverse races. I was discriminated against as a black African student from Kenya who may not compete favourably with the white students. Luckily, I excelled and completed my studies despite those odds. My personal interaction taught me the power of humility and integrity.

My time in Nigeria further exposed me to some unjust racial favouritism amongst international organizations. I learnt to survive under Nigerian military rule as we interacted with the local communities during my field research work. I also avoided “dashing” (bribe) the Nigerian army men and women who manned roadblocks on the major Ibadan-Onitsha highway. I survived the culture of giving in to anything which could compromise my moral conscience.

In many African universities, Principals of colleges and Vice-Chancellors were appointed by either the Heads of State or ministers. These were common from 1980 to 2005. The Kenyan situation started to change with the new government in 2004. The appointments were made with no specific terms of reference, training or refresher courses for the new appointees. I can confirm that my former University of Nairobi Vice-Chancellors were not trained after their appointments. Professors J. M. Mungai, P. Mbithi, F. Gichaga, C. Kiamba and G. Magoha were all appointed and told to report to work immediately.

Lately, there has been a change in the system. The Vice-Chancellors and their Deputies apply for the posts. They are then interviewed and, if found fit, given letters of appointment.

As a Vice-Chancellor, I had to administer the university with a few top managers and get all academic and administrative systems in place. I convinced myself that we must work hard as a team and show the way. I also borrowed a leaf from E.M Forster – *“one person with passion is better than forty people merely interested.”* I loved my academic work where I could decide on which project to undertake. But with the new appointment as Vice-Chancellor I had no choice other than to delegate and supervise activities. There was nobody to turn to other than the Chancellor in case I had a problem. There were flaws and advantages of having a Head of State of state as your boss.

It was an advantage that I loved my new position. I worked with zeal and solved problems as they came. There were several administrative concerns that I had no inkling at all on how to manage, one of them being the finances. I learnt on the job how to balance my books and do budgets. I knew my weakness, not being an accountant, but had taken courses in economics and basic financial management. My resolve, however, was to get the best financial manager with a number of good accountants and a tough internal auditor.

I organized seminars and invited experts to be resource persons alongside my own staff from the finance department. I learnt a lot and they also learnt a lot within a short time. We met outside the campus and I allowed for ample networking time. I got to know the government’s acceptable procedures of procurement, tendering, expenditures, incomes and balancing books. In my appointment briefs, I knew I was the ultimate respondent to any financial misappropriation.

My Deputy Vice-Chancellor (administration and finance) was also not trained; we were both raw but the many short seminars assisted us in utilizing university finances well. We followed the laid down accounting procedures and never had any audit query for the period I was at the helm of the young university. I did not want to appear before the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament on financial impropriety. Even though I had no formal training in accounts, the staff was aware that I knew a little bit of balancing the university budget. I kept my Council abreast of any shortfalls or savings in the university books.

Another area on which I needed a quick fix was staff recruitment, motivation and retention. In the 1990s the distance from Nairobi to Juja Town where the university is located seemed very far. We were all used to the universities of Nairobi and Kenyatta. Nobody wanted to commute 56 kilometres one way. The cost of fuel, wear and tear of the car and time consumed in travelling was becoming prohibitive. I sold the idea of increasing travelling allowance to the top management.

I decided to hire great scholars from other universities, private organizations and the Diaspora. The incentives were good. I had to convince the Council before I floated the ideas. I sought several PhD scholarships from universities outside. I also encouraged many young lecturers to get admission into Japanese universities with a firm commitment that their posts would be available on return and each was allowed to import a duty-free vehicle. I convinced Council to approve a higher commuting allowance than other town campuses.

We formed a land-buying welfare society to acquire plots for staff to construct controlled houses next to the campus. The Council allowed for a check-off system which was generous in amounts payable and duration. The Council had to approve the borrowing of money towards the purchase. This was the best scheme next to the campus. We approached the Ministries of Education and Finance to allow for a higher house allowance. This was passed, but later almost bundled me to court when it was again being reversed.

The allowances were almost one and a half times those of other public universities. The most attractive package which I introduced was the 80 per cent tuition waiver on qualified staff's children to study for BSc or MSc courses in JKUAT. What this essentially meant was that any child of staff who had performed well and admitted by the Joint Admissions Board (JAB) would join JKUAT and learn almost free. All permanent staff benefited from this arrangement regardless of the cadre. This move became my immediate legacy and I became a friend to many!

This was the greatest incentive which made staff dedicate their services to the university. I had done my homework, however, and knew that a very small number would qualify. Our courses were highly technical, but I encouraged staff to work on their offspring and take advantage of the package.

I also allowed transfers from other universities to JKUAT as long as the cut-off points were met. Two great advantages were eminent: a direct additional financial gain by parents on educating their children and a controlled group of students in case of riots. A critical number of parents in such gains would not wish their children to riot, boycott classes or get into mischief lest they lose the benefit.

I had indirectly turned workers into managers of students. University riots were the order of the day from the 1980s to 2005. I had planned to reciprocate student exchange with other universities, but left before I could implement the idea. For sure, Moi University was willing to discuss the plan. More recently, many Kenyan universities have been giving specified tuition remissions to their workers.

I mooted this idea earlier to curb staff migration and create a university where all workers and students had a say and a sense of belonging. It turned out to be a truly cohesive community. All these activities were funded by the savings we made in the expenditure and government resources. Some research funds that generated interest also boosted the various budgets.

There were areas which I found easy to handle. They included getting out to the public to sell the university. My public relations office was so well equipped that I did not have to worry about our image. Junior staff members were easier to convince on new ideas than top management.

I never discriminated against the cleaners or security guards when it came to meetings or workshops. I organized theirs to fit their terms of service. End-of-year parties and mid-year bonding were my most productive interactions. There was no time as satisfying to a junior worker than when he/she sat on the same table with a dean or professor for a meal or drink. They felt appreciated and respected. They talked freely, and even made suggestions on how they should run their events. I used to tell them that it was their turn and day to tell it like it was. They felt free to interact and express themselves. This freedom was an eye-opener for me in management techniques.

The meetings we held gave me a chance to evaluate the impact of decisions. In such circumstances, I opened up to all staff and became more responsive. The books I used to read on corporate governance advocated staff bonding and allowed for free thinking space. I wanted to achieve many things and this could not be possible without teamwork.

This was when I knew that leadership rested on the wise and sensible use of power. Staff would always trust in you if you identified with them and at times put yourself in their shoes at their places of work. The attrition turn-over of my staff was very small. The incentives were so binding that a good number of them opted to stay at JKUAT and retire from there.

Administration and management of many African universities were many a time through crises. The Vice-Chancellors who had no prior training in administration found themselves making decisions which were not in tandem with people's expectations. My main role was to ensure that academic programmes were adhered to and administration issues followed as well. Senate was my right-hand body. I had a number of senior lecturers and professors who were dedicated to building a modern technical university.

Whenever I had decisions to make, Senate would be convened and I would discuss them freely. I learnt my work on the job, trained on the job, grew on the job and resolved difficult cases on the job. No advance management training had been provided. It was a trial-and-error philosophy. Handling of students was varied. I had a liking for good performance, but we had some notorious students who needed counselling and continuous advice.

They were also to be managed and I played the role of counselling them. No one could predict the events of any given day.

Despite the few incentives and equitable distribution of university privileges, Kenyan public university staff always agitated for higher salaries and better pay packages. There was no single year from 1980 to date when staff in all grades had not asked for some increase in salaries. Several strikes paralysed learning in the universities. The strikes usually involved all universities. In Kenya, we have a powerful committee of Vice-Chancellors who normally meet to compare notes and share common management problems.

The University Academic Staff Union (UASU) is the registered union which agitates for better terms and conditions of service. I recall one strike in 1994 which paralysed university learning for a long period of time. We met with staff on many occasions to resolve the impasse, although my own institution had not been affected. We met as Vice-Chancellors to chart a way forward with the Ministry of Education but no resolution was arrived at.

The Vice-Chancellors had to sort out the problem individually. The Ministries of Education and Treasury gave us a blackout. They bluntly told us that there was no money to increase salaries and other allowances. That was bad news for public universities.

In the very early 1980s university lecturers were the highest paid group. Civil servants were several grades lower than them. The argument was straightforward. To teach at any university worth its salt, a lecturer had to have earned a PhD degree from a recognized university. This is the basic prerequisite. The lecturer was expected to teach and conduct research and then publish.

To be a civil servant, one did not need to have a PhD. It was not mandatory. It was therefore easier for a lecturer to be appointed into civil service and perform routine strait-jacket duties than a civil servant to come and start lecturing and conducting research. University teaching then was attractive and well-paying. Unfortunately, the pay and benefits have been reversed over the years. This has resulted into continuous academic erosion in terms of brain drain.

Each Vice-Chancellor had to sort out the strike. Several staff members went through disciplinary procedures and their services were terminated by their respective Councils. I fully sympathized with the staff but advised them to continue teaching since their demands had been made. There were a few who were very adamant and could have been sacked, but I did not convene Council's sub-committee on disciplinary matters. I used my own discretion and handled the matter sensibly. No one was sacked or implicated for disciplinary action. The strike fizzled out.

I used to read speeches during my graduation ceremonies. During one of the occasions, I never minced my words. I told the Chancellor about the urgent need to review the university salaries. The request was construed to be rude but

in actual fact staff deserved better remuneration packages. Subsequent strikes followed. And even as I write this book, there are pending industrial strike threats. Yet, personally, I have always believed in a contented group of workers who are then motivated to quality work.

My reflections on the role of a Vice-Chancellor are based on the quality of the individuals and their academic progression. Management skills are necessary for negotiations when it comes to university issues. The roles of Vice-Chancellors are known and cut across all universities. Personnel in public and private sectors are better placed to conduct relations, financial management, resources, utilization and dispute handling. Academic matters should be handled by the chief executives and Councils. Learning on the job is cumbersome, demanding and time-wasting.

University lecturers have a lot of respect for their own leader who ably guides them. The Vice-Chancellor must have an impeccable record, morally and academically. It is the only way to win and command respect. The idea of appointing a chief executive of the university without proper consultations is misguided.

A few of the randomly chosen Vice-Chancellors worked well with staff and students. But the majority of them ran into perpetual problems. The current method of advertising for the posts leaves a lot to be desired. The advertisements are placed by those acting in the same positions and the requirements are clearly skewed to fit them. International competitiveness lacks in the whole process and so the status quo usually remains.

The Double In-take, the Creation of Colleges and Campuses

Public universities admit students annually but reporting dates vary from campus to campus. There were usually big backlogs of students due to frequent closures and wasted time. High school leavers had to wait for up to 18 months before they reported to their respective universities. This was common in the 1980s and the public was not amused. Their children had nothing to do for the many months that they stayed home after high school completion.

Public universities still admit students through the Joint Admissions Board (JAB). This is a reputable non-corruptible board of university leaders/heads who meet to determine cut-off points for admission to various programmes in the public universities. It includes the Vice-Chancellors, their deputies, deans and registrars of all public universities. The exercise is carried out in the most transparent manner which is made public through all channels of communication. The new University Act of 2012 stipulates to replace JAB with a Central university Admissions Board for all Kenyan universities. It will be responsible for apportioning students to both public and private universities which are legally recognized by law. This central admissions board has not been constituted by time of writing this book.

The Chancellor of all public universities, who was then the president, once in his off-the cuff roadside speeches in 1992 directed that all students who were qualified should be admitted at once to public universities and report to their respective campuses. Any backlogs were to report to constituent colleges and Vice-Chancellors had no alternative but to sort out accommodation, laboratories, lecture halls and lecturers. The Vice-Chancellors and principals had no alternative but to implement such an impromptu presidential decree! All systems were on motion.

The creation of the current universities has a history which started in 1989. The then chancellor of all public universities directed that all qualified students be admitted to the universities at once. His word was final. A committee comprising members from JAB and the Ministry of Education was formed to scout for suitable colleges and/or institutions to accommodate over 3,000 qualified students. I was appointed the chairman of the task force and we had to physically visit all possible suitable institutions.

The terms of reference were clear: (a) to inspect institutions which would accommodate over 3,000 students; (b) to check for adequate learning facilities, lecture theatres and laboratories; (c) to ensure functional infrastructure, dining and residential halls; (d) to check on any other available facility like vehicles and machinery; (e) specific number to be accommodated by each of the targeted institutions.

The committee under my chairmanship was given seven days to report back the findings. The Treasury was to receive the report and the then vice-president, Prof. George Saitoti, was tasked to source funds for the extra facilities and students. We were assured that our expenses would be catered for expeditiously. This was a directive from the highest office and our duty was to perform.

I assembled the team from the other four public universities to scout for appropriate colleges. I planned the trip and proposed to my team that we start from Western Kenya. All I had to do was ask the Ministry of Education representative to call the heads of the institutes we were to visit. Mr Joshua Terer obliged and alerted them all. The beginning of the creation of campuses started in earnest when we hit the road.

We visited the following institutions: Narok Campus, Kericho, Kisii, Maseno, Eregi, Chepkoilel, Laikipia, Kagumo, Kenya Science, Voi and made telephone calls to Mombasa Polytechnic. We had run out of time and had to compile a report within 24 hours after returning from each visit. I appointed one person per institute visited to compile a draft report immediately after visitation.

We designed a draft guideline following the terms of reference we had received. The writers were to come up with a complete draft the following morning before we continued to our next stop. I further asked one other member, Prof. Everett Standa, to collect all the reports, collate them and start compiling them into one

document. The use of current ICT facilities was not available then and so we had to write our reports manually to be typed later. We received hostile reception at some colleges but I warned that stern action would be taken against those who would not co-operate.

After one week, we converged at Kenyatta University Boardroom on a Saturday morning to finalize the compilation of the report to be delivered to the vice-president and minister for finance on a Monday morning for action. Students had to report for lectures to the new campuses in September and systems had to be put in place by then. Yet we had been doing the visits in July 1992 under extremely rigid deadlines! The basic underlying factor was the availability of funds to cater for the staff and basic facilities as needed. The ball was thrown back to the government.

Our mission was simple and specific: to get places for double-intake students. The exercise was not smooth as expected. The heads of various colleges were adamant and did not want us to inspect their premises. Some of them moved away their buses and hid them so that they could not be entered in our inventory column. At one college, the principal instructed security guards not to allow us in because we were intruders and did not have written express permission from the ministry headquarters. We were not bothered. Little did they know that we had a Ministry of Education representative who was their boss. He insisted on seeing such principal himself on identification. I also kept in touch with the chairman of Vice-Chancellors' committee, Prof. Phillip Githinji, who encouraged us. I later learnt that the principals who had resisted our inspection were either sacked or retired.

Acquisition of colleges meant a lot to the staff and property of the affected institutions. There could be a complete overhaul of the proposed new university college in terms of support personnel, lecturers and courses. Staff vetting would be carried out in terms of qualifications required for one to teach at the university level. A good number of tutors then did not have the qualifications to enable them be appointed or absorbed as lecturers. Some of the principals themselves were not suitable and yet they still wanted to continue running the colleges! Support staff, administrators and other cadre were to be interviewed and, if found fit, would be absorbed. We had to take personnel's details as a basis for budgeting.

The exercise ended smoothly and we compiled the report for implementation by the relevant ministries. Our engagement was over after the delivery of the report. A few colleges were selected for the first phase after we had visited ten of them. Those selected at that time included: Maseno Campus, Chepkoilel, Laikipia and Narok College. These met the basic requirements for immediate occupancy after some basic renovations of facilities. They had to be ready to receive students, lecturers, administrators and a principal. The hard work of structuring and steering the new campuses, with no notion of a university setup, had started.

The Scramble for Colleges

My Vision for JKUAT

After my appointment as a Vice-Chancellor, I had my own vision and a specific mission to accomplish: that JKUAT should be a reputable transforming university which could attract students from all over the world. I also knew that for years, our students who had qualified to study locally were locked out of admission due to lack of admission slots and infrastructure. Hundreds of Kenyan students had to leave the country to study abroad. I knew this because the number admitted was small and those left out far outweighed those admitted by public universities. I had also been involved in fundraising for hundreds of students who were admitted into universities abroad and needed financial support.

The travel and tuition expenses in foreign countries were paid in foreign currency. Living costs abroad were nowhere comparable to ours here. What bothered me most was the fact that the courses sought outside were at first-degree level. The country spent colossal amounts of foreign exchange for this purpose. Private universities were few and could not absorb many students. I scrutinized the University Act of 1994 and the statutes. We had to evoke the relevant clauses.

Our statutes stipulated that the University Senate decided who to teach, what to teach, how to teach, where to teach, and when to teach. This conditionality was to adhere to the laid-down procedures on upholding the quality of our programme. I read and understood what was required before new programmes were begun out of the campus. In other words, how legal was it to teach students in appropriately chosen sites for the purpose of taking education to the other parts of the country?

In 1998, I decided to evoke the clause “where to teach”. I also wanted to reduce the foreign currency flow out of Kenya. I informed my top management that I wanted to start out-of-campus programmes. I further implored them that there were colleges which would assist in this process. The idea was adopted and I prepared a paper. I also checked what the procedure was in other developed countries. These would be satellite campuses of JKUAT. It was a practice in many universities elsewhere.

The Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology became the first public institution to initiate linkages and the creation of affiliate campuses in Kenya. The senate approved the idea in principle and I led the team to explore the possibility. I knew for a fact that space, staff accommodation and laboratories would be a challenge. I had thought of several options.

The terminology we used then was “*alternative degree programmes*”. I recall a heated debate arising from the choice of the name. We eventually settled on it and later called those students admitted under this programme “*parallel degree students*”. The University of Nairobi domesticated the initiative and excelled in it.

I had two important missions: to make education available to qualified Kenyans and reduce students' exodus to foreign universities. The amount payable locally was less than that paid externally. Parents, sponsors and finally the government would gain from the arrangement. Private universities only admitted very few students then.

The Senate and the Council bought the idea and we started scouting for appropriate campuses, willing heads of institutions and linkages with the Diamond Systems, Mombasa Polytechnic, Nairobi Institute of Technology, Kenya Teachers College, Kisii Campus, Lamu College, Rosemary College, The Nairobi Campus, KCA, Strathmore, Nakuru, among others. The Senate had the control of the type of campus we needed and the courses we had to offer. Most of them were technical. We selected a few of the chosen ones to teach at Bachelor's levels. Science, ICT courses, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering were approved to be mounted. We also introduced diploma courses in specific areas.

The concern which we had to solve was staffing and manageable numbers of students. Before approving a programme, we had to identify the lecturers to teach, the space and laboratories available where applicable. We made one condition clear: Not to enrol an excess number of students over and above those sponsored by the government.

Nurturing Staff as Future Managers, the 'crème de la crème'

It has always been my belief that I must train staff with the ultimate aim for them to take over from me in various capacities of serving the nation. I believe in a smooth and competent succession. I have even trained my family members to appreciate that we are not immortal.

People come and go; leaders come and go; but institutions stay. I started to train my Deputy Vice-Chancellors indirectly to be fully responsible in their duties and whenever they acted for me, they did so with full knowledge of performing well. I did not fear being thrown over or outshone. I knew my capability, the depth and stature of my energy. Whenever I delegated my duties, I gave clear instructions and limits of the assignments. During my tenure, all my deputies ended up being heads of various higher learning institutions.

My deans, directors and chairmen also became heads of institutions. I knew well that future Kenyan universities would need principals and Vice-Chancellors. At the time of compiling this book, the following ladies and gentlemen were heads of institutions: my former Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the late Prof. Frederick N. Onyango, became the founding Vice-Chancellor of Maseno University, Rosalind Mutua became the founding Vice-Chancellor, Keriri Women's University, Prof. Henry Thairu became the founding Vice-Chancellor of Inoorero University, Prof. Wilson Kipng'eno became the founding Vice-Chancellor of the University

of Kabianga. Several deans and directors also took over the helm of many Kenyan universities and they included Prof. Kioni Ndirangu, (Kimathi University of Science and Technology), Prof. Teresa Akenga, The University of Eldoret, Prof. Mabel Imbuga (The Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology), Prof. Josephat Mwatelah (Founding Vice-Chancellor, Mombasa Technical University), Prof. Joseph Magambo (Meru Technical university), Prof. Stephen Gaya Agong (Founding Vice-Chancellor, Oginga Odinga University), Prof. Oyawa (Ag. Vice-Chancellor, Multi-Media University), and Prof. Festus Kaberia (Vice-Chancellor, Multi-Media).

There are several principals who head the colleges which will soon be elevated to fully-fledged universities. They include Prof. John Ochora (Kisii College Campus), Prof. Hamada Boga (Taita-Taveta University College), Prof. Victoria Ngumi (Karen Campus Nairobi). Others are Professors Esther Kahangi, Romanos Odhiambo, Makhanu, Marangi Mbogo, Isaac Inoti, Linus Gitonga, and Francis Mathooko, who serve as Deputy Vice-Chancellors. Others include Prof. Florence Lenga, Mr. Joel Mberia, and Prof. Christine Onyango, who also serve as deputies in other institutions.

The genesis of the said positions was mooted during the creation of affiliate colleges. My vision and mission in the 1990s bore several fully-fledged universities headed by the staff that I had interacted with during my tenure as the Principal and later Founding Vice-Chancellor of JKUAT. I used to hint to them that the support they gave me would bear fruit and that they too would demand similar support in future. It is important to note that the quality and dedication of the named persons elevated them to the positions. There was no outside influence or canvassing.

In Kenya these days, positions are advertised and purported to be filled competitively without any undue influence. Sadly, however, this is not the case in many circumstances. The 2010 Kenyan Constitution was supposed to bring major changes in the way Kenyans run their affairs. This was particularly important as far as basic human rights principles are concerned. There are obvious glaring misgivings in certain quarters, like nepotism and cronyism.

There is evidence of people who merit positions or promotions but certain forces with selfish interests and preferences have sidelined them. We still have a long way to go in order to appreciate meritocracy and its benefits. I have only selected staff that worked closely with me and supported the mission and vision of the university. There are others who joined other positions in the government and the list may be too long. I chose to highlight from the creation of our affiliate colleges which were later converted into fully-fledged universities.

I further believed in training staff to the highest possible degree to replenish the staff attrition or mobility. Hence, I linked up with international organizations and universities to acquire scholarships.

One cardinal rule I believed in was to explain my personal experiences in the job of a Vice-Chancellor. I advised my mentees that there was nothing more difficult to tackle, more perilous to conduct or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things, a new university or university college.

Universities in Kenya are created by annexing existing training colleges and turning them into universities. The colleges are affiliated to an older university which ensures growth and development in all areas. The parent university allows the affiliate colleges to be chartered after going through very rigorous induction procedures. It is not possible to enumerate the academic and personnel steps needed to accredit a university; but suffice it say that in the 1980s and 1990s, parent universities had to induct affiliated colleges and ensure that they were complete in staffing, infrastructure, library and any other requirements necessary for accreditation. Most Kenyan universities underwent this process which was, in some case, viewed by the small colleges as punitive.

With the repeal of individual universities Acts, the Commission for University Education will alleviate the need for excessive vetting. Colleges are still linked to a parent university. The scramble for space, market places, towns, shopping centres, high-rises, and technical schools is so intense that communities are confused. There are so many university learning places that competition for students is viewed as affecting academic quality. The creation of many campuses has necessitated hiring of lecturers who may not be qualified in a particular area of expertise. This topic will be dealt with in later chapters under quality assurance in our universities. It is a major concern and needs urgent attention.

Reflections

One of my greatest lessons of leadership is the knowledge that no task was beneath me. I had plans for a university, infrastructure and staff development. I knew what it took to convince my Senate and Council to move the agenda forward. I decided to mentor my potential followers by spending time working with them. I displayed thoroughness in my daily work and had a focused plan. My dedication to work, daily commitment to quality, excellence and persistence, made a difference in my staff and students.

They learnt from me and many gained experience in the process. I will always remember one example given by my colleague at a luncheon. He drew a fish on a chart, labelled its parts and asked us a simple question: when a fish rots, where does the rot begin? We gave various answers. A good number wrote down the word head. I wrote down the brain. He laughed at my answer and gave it an extra mark.

Fish, indeed, start to rot from the head, more specifically the brain. He was comparing governments and institutions in Kenya. They start rotting from the heads of the institutions. If the head is brainless so is the institution.

During the process of leadership, there are key challenges and performance indicators which create a cohesive value system. Team leaders strive to create mutual value systems which are beneficial to all. The leader creates a conducive working environment where expectations are mutual.

I decided to create a shared value system which defined ethical standards, integrity, innovation, and tolerance of all types of diversity. In my building of such shared academic value systems, I came up with stark reality of the diversity of human nature. I could not have one approach in problem-solving or overcoming the challenges. I learnt to understand variations in staff mentoring. I was able to re-mould some staff that later became heads of institutions. They learned how I solved problems facing staff and students and were able to apply the same approach in their future careers. It was on-the-job learning and solving problems in-situ.

My mentoring of future leaders did not proceed without challenges. I went through turbulent times and occasionally wished that I was not Vice-Chancellor of a university. Both staff and students would make demands which would be beyond my comprehension. I, however, used the same people to solve some of the problems and we eventually came up with solutions. I will highlight a few examples in later chapters.

In principle, I had a few words of wisdom to pass on to my colleagues. I always reminded them to obey and respect authority, observe the employees' working hours, perform duties timely, be responsible and accountable, provide quality services and remember that employees were dispensable.

Moi and Mori Meet

Normally, any Japanese delegation which came to Kenya had to visit the famous JKUAT. It was the ultimate visiting place after the Maasai Mara or coastal region of Kenya. I used to receive numerous courtesy calls and hosted all types of dignitaries. They included politicians, emperors and empresses, technocrats, tourists, professors and business magnets. The University was a household name in both Japan and Kenya. The Japanese team apparently wanted to come to ensure that their taxes were being put into profitable use and not squandered on unnecessary projects.

There are two outstanding visits which gave me sleepless nights: the courtesy call by the Princess and Prince, and their Excellencies the President of Kenya and the Prime Minister of Japan. During the Princess's tour, the Japanese Ambassador and JICA were to be fully involved to ensure that everything was right for their visit to JKUAT.

On my part, I had to prepare the gifts, touring of the campus and snacks. My wife, Esther, and I were to pick appropriate native wears for the Princess and a souvenir for the Prince. I recall protocol being concerned that we should not pick certain colours which are detestable in Japanese' culture. My wife was able to

pick an outfit which was highly appreciated by both parties. Their visit was one of the most covered in the media both locally and internationally. After the tour, they praised the work done and even boosted JICA's support to increase technical assistance. They spent about two hours and each passing minute was a blessing to me as I wanted them to leave for other state tours. The pressure of the protocol involved had been rather too much on us!

The other visit was by the two Heads of State, Moi and Mori. We got information that the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr Mori, was to visit Kenya and targeted JKUAT as one of the sites he would visit. The Ambassador of Japan, JICA, Kenya Foreign Affairs and the university had to prepare accordingly. This was apparently the first time the Japanese Premier was visiting Kenya. We were also told that he could be accompanied by the President of Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi. This was the first time for me to receive two dignitaries at the same time on my campus. I had interacted with President Moi at least several times and knew how to handle him: but for Mori, perhaps it was going to be a nightmare.

All systems were in operation. I was given the itinerary by the protocol officials, advised on the routing within the campus and preparation for high tea. We had to rehearse and rehearse on how to receive the two guests without causing scenes. Vehicle arrangement was a concern to the Japanese team, in terms of who came first or last. Anyway, after several runs we agreed on the basic movement pattern.

Both men could not directly communicate because of language barrier, but Foreign Affairs officers took care of this issue. When the Excellences arrived, official security details disorganized us so much that whatever rehearsals we had gone through for weeks came to naught.

I found myself next to President Moi instead of being closer to the Prime Minister of Japan for any explanations. We were thrown into disarray and everybody seemed to move about as if they were enjoying themselves, not bothered with our earlier arrangement. In fact I now found myself more comfortable with President Moi as I explained to him what we do in field research. The Prime Minister Mori would pass by me with a wide smile and I had to explain to him slowly the work we do through a translator.

He was a jovial Prime Minister who later in the afternoon enjoyed a Taekwondo show which was put up by my students. In fact, this was the best official visit I had ever hosted. The two Head of States of state had spent the whole afternoon in my campus inspecting the projects. Again their memorable visit boosted the name of the university and even led to increased JICA technical co-operation. I had an excellent public relations team who prepared for modest gifts for the two dignitaries. I only wished they knew what I had gone through the previous two weeks in preparation for the visits. A sample of speeches I used to make during the annual meetings is hereby reproduced. A typical message that I delivered to the former Japan-trained colleagues is hereby reproduced.

Message from the Patron, Prof. Ratemo Waya Michieka – Annual Meeting 2013

I have been a JEPAK Patron for over now 10 years. As a group of people who have benefited from JICA sponsorship under different programmes, we will forever be grateful to the government of Japan through JICA for this very good relationship. As compared to other bilateral donors, the government of Japan has always stood with the people of Kenya even during very difficult times globally. The challenge for us now is how much of the knowledge we acquired in Japan has been put into practice on return to Kenya: How much impact have we made in Kenya, now that we have received the training in Japan? In other words, how much can we show after the training?

To some extent as the Patron, I have personally witnessed some impacts especially during the Annual National Conferences whose themes touch on various issues of concern for this nation. The other such activity is the medical camp that shows our social responsiveness to the people of Kenya and especially those economically and socially disadvantaged among us. Indeed this is the only alumni in Kenya that engages itself in such activities as a way of paying back to the nation to which gave the participants this great opportunity.

I, however, challenge you members to come up with more activities where you have the potential. I look forward to that time.’

The JEPAK annual calendar was effectively implemented as planned with the members going to Olkaria geothermal plant in Naivasha for the educational tour, medical camp at the City Cotton slums, and the end-of-year orientation party for the former and new participants. Of great impact was the Annual National Conference whose theme was ‘The Future of the Boy Child’. In the words of the Chief Guest, Dr Naomi Shaban, who was then Minister for Gender, Children and Social Development, ‘the theme was a clear indication that JEPAK has noticed the alarming trends in the general care and protection of the boy child who seem to have been forgotten’.

Traditionally, in the African culture, the boy child was more adored than the girl child. This, however, changed when the many crusaders for the welfare of the girl child, affirmative action and policies came into being and seemed to place the boy child to the periphery.

In appreciating the theme of this conference I was hopeful that we could develop a solid paper and the genesis of a working committee to articulate the challenges of the boy child and especially what is hurting him. I mentioned the contributing factors to this problem as ranging from moral degradation, absence of a father figure/authority, alcoholism, drug abuse and neglect among others.

The harsh reality of growing up in sub-Saharan Africa does not make things any easy for the boy child. In some situations, going to school is a luxury that has

to be put aside for more important things. The upshot of all this is a boy child who ends up in the dumps or in a dangerous state of Nihilism. He becomes an enemy of society who has to be paid back in equally harsh measures that is how we lose potential future leaders.

The points to ponder over this situation include: Is the alienation of the boy child deliberate and calculated? What are the current trends and consequences? How do we identify the myths from facts regarding cultural beliefs, equality before the law among others? One other serious question would be: Where is the future of the advantaged girl if the boy child is not there? The country has to reflect and seek a way out for depicting the true meaning of gender equality and discrimination.

In addition to the above points, specific recommendations that the conference felt would be pointers to the way forward included; reviewing of the Sexual Offences Act which is too severe, need for more attention for the boy child in disability status, programmes that would bring boys together with men as a way of mentoring, commensurate rewards in education should be well defined and implemented among others. I actually strongly recommend for quality education especially in science and technology.

As an organization with a rich pool of human resource power, I would encourage you to continue tapping this wealth in order to shape the destiny of this country. I urge you to proactively contribute to the economic development of Kenya in meeting its aspirations of Vision 2030 which calls for the country to be globally competitive and prosperous nation with quality life for all citizens.

Finally, I wish to appreciate the continued support from JICA, without which none of the above activities would have been accomplished. I particularly register my profound gratitude to Mr. Eguchi, JICA Kenya Chief Representative, for his participation in almost all JEPAK activities. *“Thank you all and long live our friendship”*.

This is the kind of speech I usually make whenever we have the meeting. I cover contemporary topical issues which need attention. They are usually widely covered in the press and I get to be contacted to give ideas or solutions on the same. I am still the patron of the organization and it is useful to meet and compare notes.

Challenges and Mischiefs from Students

It would be totally misleading to depict JKUAT students as trouble-free. No university in Kenya can boast of having a perfect group of students. Just like all public university Vice-Chancellors in Kenya, I also had my fair share of headaches from students. The difference was in the management of the same.

I would like to demonstrate this by citing a few examples. I usually had an Occurrence Book kept by my Chief Security Officer who recorded all the events within the 24-hour period. I read every entry and made remarks against each one.

If I felt that some were more serious than others, then I would ask for more details on the same or make appropriate recommendations for the relevant department to take action. By and large, many of the reported cases were trivial and would need action by the deans or deputy principals. Most students' problems ended up being handled by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (academic affairs).

My very first appointment to JKUAT was to be a deputy principal, academic affairs. All academic programmes and examinations were overseen by me. I therefore had a very clear understanding of what it meant to be in charge of students' affairs. As a university Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Henry Thairu served as my first DVC (AA). I knew what he had inherited from me and the kind of life he would lead thereafter.

Most occurrences in the registry involved students' behaviour. Besides recorded cases, I used to receive calls whenever there was any major problem. My landline then was available 24 hours, seven days a week and had to be operational throughout. My wife, Esther, and kids knew what to say and how to handle any university calls.

My previous interaction with students was an asset in handling difficult cases. Sample the following incidences. The university is located on a major highway, Thika-Nairobi, where motorists speed with no regard to pedestrians. There is a flyover that the students can use without danger. But others decide to cross the highway without using the flyover.

I got a call one evening that a student had been hit by a motorist who did not stop for fear of being killed by the public. The students who witnessed the accident mobilized and started pelting innocent motorists with stones. They damaged several vehicles of unsuspecting motorists. The police took some time to arrive at the scene. They, however, dispersed the demonstrating students, apprehended a few and booked them in.

I received another call from OCS office at 2 am that some of my students had been locked in at the Juja Police Station for causing disturbance in a public place and they needed advice urgently. I got up and called the Deputy Vice-Chancellor in charge of Administration to get in touch with the relevant authorities at the Police Station and decide on the action to be taken. He delayed in following up the matter and within two hours, at about 4 am the whole campus descended on the Police Station demanding the release of their comrades.

I was again called by the OCS of Juja and so I decided to personally go there to sort out the issue. To avoid too much hullabaloo, I requested for the release of the four students on bond to be charged later in a court of law. The boys were released in the morning and life went on. I negotiated for the release of the students to avoid unnecessary confrontation which would have resulted in further damage of property. I had an excellent rapport with the officer in charge of the station.

Another incident was when one lecturer erred in his teaching materials in Chemistry. He had a good course outline which he circulated to students as required. He had to give continuous assessments as required by the Senate. I think by mistake or sheer carelessness, he set an examination based on topics he had not covered.

The paper was difficult and the whole class walked away on him, boycotting the examination. As if that was not enough, the students demanded the lecturer's immediate sack. They further went ahead and frog-matched him past my office and then out of the gate. I heard some whistles as they were escorting the lecturer out. On enquiring, I was told that I had no business in internal class problems and inconsiderate lecturers. I got the story later and shelved it as the DVC (AA) had already handled it.

Another unfortunate event which I had to personally get involved in was when a fifth-year architecture student was tossed out of a 4th floor window. One evening at around 11 pm, students were doing their projects in the studio. They normally require space and a quiet working place just like a library.

One student came in with a radio and kept on playing some music as others embarked on their projects. He was requested several times to turn the radio low or use earphones. The young fellow ignored the pleas from his comrades. The students were preparing the projects for examinations. In a matter of minutes, a group of them walked to where he was sitting, lifted him and literally tossed him out of the window.

He landed on a concrete floor and ended up with broken limbs. The students locked up the studio from inside and continued with their projects. They indeed took the law into their own hands. I was called at midnight and I advised the medical officer on duty to handle the matter and ensure safe custody and care for the injured student.

The following morning, things were back to normal but I ordered for a speedy investigation in order to bring to book the students who had been involved in the heinous act. As the injured student was recovering in the University Hospital he was able to name the culprits. The fractured leg was put on a caste and the student would support himself to classes and other places. He had a friend who assisted him whenever necessary. He confessed that he had been playing loud music against the advice and pleas from his fellow classmates. I advised all of them that in certain circumstances, common sense must prevail.

There was always very high tension among the students whenever examinations were approaching. The student who eventually got injured should have known better and ought to have been considerate. I ordered those who tossed him out of the window to pay for his treatment and a penalty fee instead of pressing for justice outside the campus. Luckily, the young man recovered well and the culprits apologized in writing to the student and to his parents. The disciplinary

committee was satisfied with the decision and let things rest there. I later ordered for visible postings on the walls that no music or noise is allowed in various reading rooms and libraries.

When I was an undergraduate student in the 1970s, I remember being locked in the library while reading past 2 am. I did not observe the closure time because I was so engrossed in reading a Chemistry subject in which I had an examination the following morning. Time passed unnoticed. I recalled my experience as I was advising the young men. Students' minds are completely occupied; and slightest provocation would result into an unprecedented reaction.

Reflecting on my whole tenure as a university leader and my relationship with students, I would say that I managed to contain any tensions among the student community and minimize any violent conflicts which in most cases are a feature of public university life in Kenya. The only violent riots that took place leading to the closure of all public universities in Kenya were those sparked by the implementation of World Bank-supported cost-sharing policies in 1991. Then, I had barely started my tenure as principal (academic affairs), and the riots, in a sense, welcomed me to the upper echelons of university administration. A brief description of the context within which this happened and how I handled it at the institutional level is necessary here.

Forced by the World Bank to implement cost-sharing measures in higher education in 1991, the government did mandate public university Vice-Chancellors to meet and recommend how best such measures would be implemented with little disruption.

The Vice-Chancellors held a meeting on 27 June 1991 at the University of Nairobi where they discussed issues regarding the University students' loan scheme and how best it would be managed to create an effective revolving fund. Besides addressing strategies of sustaining the loan scheme, the Vice-Chancellors went ahead and restructured the manner of tuition fee payment which, if implemented, involved direct token payments by all students towards tuition fees. Bursaries were also introduced for students from poor families based on criteria of the level of need to be determined by the universities.

As expected, there was a general negative reaction to this announcement, with various newspapers, to some degree, misrepresenting the actual situation as announced by the Vice-Chancellors. *The Daily Nation* of 30 June 1991, for example, ran a headline, "Boom times may soon be history." 'Boom' was the name given to the allowances that students used to receive from the government. *The Kenya Times*, another daily on 29 June 1991 had a headline, "New Varsities Fee Structure". It is needless to say that the total effect of the media stories contributed to violent student riots in the universities, which led to the closure of the institutions for the better part of the second half of 1991 and the loss of some lives.

As deputy principal (academic) and reacting to the newspaper stories and the tension they had sparked off among the student community, I prepared a memo on 29 June 1991 to various section heads of the college. I informed that I had personally gone around the college and noted the tension among most of the students. Given the tension that was evident among the students, I requested the various section heads to observe the following to calm the situation:

That each of us be involved in explaining to the students on the exact figures involved and correct the distortions from the media that all their allowances had been scrapped.

Each of us makes rounds within the campus, to talk to any group of students who may require explanations and remove all or any notices or posters on the boards from students that may appear to be of inciting nature.

Assure the staff of my availability in the compound on the subsequent days until midnight to sort out any crisis.

Later on that same day, at around 5.15 pm, I wrote another memo to all students on behalf of the college principal. Noting of the various meetings I had held with students and staff earlier on that day, I indicated that all the misleading distortions that had been passed on to the student community regarding their allowances had been explained. Consequently, I informed the students that a meeting of the college academic board had decided the following in nature:

That normal college activity should continue undisturbed. Any interference with fellow students would not be tolerated.

There could not be any more unauthorized meetings/processions held by students in the University college premises.

Attempts by any students to hold meetings/processions outside the University College would be dealt with appropriately.

In the event of any of the above being contravened, serious and prompt action would be taken against the individual or group of students concerned.

My Reflections

How was I coping, attending to national duties and to my nucleus family? I was used to multi-tasking and delegation. I delegated a lot and knew the strengths and weaknesses of my management staff. I knew how unbelievably hardworking and competent many of them were. That confidence I had in them built them up to greater heights. I was also committed to seeing that my family did not miss me on account of excessive national duties. I finished all my day's work in the office and very seldom did I bring any work home.

I knew that 90 per cent of my success was showing up early at work and being present unless I was called elsewhere outside to attend to other meetings. I always made sure that I was the first one in the office and the last one to leave. I was not necessarily at my desk always. No. I walked around in the lecture theatres, laboratories, dining halls, farms, libraries and even halls of residence.

I got a clear first-hand picture of the happenings on the ground. I would at times make some decisions on the spot and even then follow up with confirmation notes.

My memory of the names of staff and students was and is still sharp. I still remember many by their names. That in itself was an advantage to me as we could freely interact anywhere with respect. Members of staff felt proud and appreciated me for identifying with them.

On the family side, we were able to travel together on holidays. My family visited major African cities like Dar-es-Salaam, Zanzibar, Cape Town, Cairo and Alexandria. For each trip we made, my children appreciated the different cultures and lifestyles of the locals and compared them with the Kenyan ones. We still recall the amazing tourist sceneries like the Table Mountains and Roben Island of Cape Town, the Cairo Museums of Egypt, the oldest Library in Alexandria, the Cloves Industry in Zanzibar and many other attractions. The visits gave them some impetus to work hard for their future.

