
Exiting University Administration

My tenure as a Vice-Chancellor was eventful, rich and fulfilling. The ascent from a deputy principal to the rank of a university leader had its consequences. My interaction with all types of individuals within and without the university precincts taught me various lessons and hardened my resolve and approach to issues.

The sudden news of my appointment to JKUAT, which is discussed elsewhere, took the same mode on departure. I was taught one thing by my father when I was growing up. He always said that as one grows up, one expects the very best in life. The key word here is “expects”. He would then remark, “*Young boy, life ahead is full of challenges and big responsibilities.*” I literally witnessed and experienced the same.

The 2002 Kenyan General Election

Kenyan politics are unpredictable. I grew up hearing of the Founding Father of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. He was the first Chancellor of the University of Nairobi. His two Vice-Chancellors were Dr Josephat Karanja, who became the vice-president of Daniel Arap Moi and Prof. Joseph Maina Mungai, who served under both presidents. Graduation ceremonies at the university of Nairobi were pompous, colourful and unifying. It was the only university then and it was mandatory that the Chancellor personally presides over the ceremony.

I worked under President Moi for virtually all the period I was a Vice-Chancellor. Vice-Chancellors in Kenya’s five public universities were appointees of the president. These positions were therefore political in nature. The individual university acts specified so. My VC colleagues were all KANU followers.

That was the only party for a long period of time, from independence in 1963 to 2002. In fact no one survived an appointment without being a staunch KANU follower by action and/or expression. I happened to be a silent follower, which almost cost me my second-term appointment as a VC. I suspected I was only reappointed because there was no shortcoming regarding my work to stop Moi from renewing my tenure for a second term.

Politics and manipulation played a role in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and heads of other parastatals, as well as permanent secretaries. I considered the sycophancy as the ugliest culture in our Kenyan society.

Elections were conducted in 2002 and President Kibaki won, becoming the third president of Kenya and, by law, my new Chancellor. The status quo remained for a while and life continued normally. We all celebrated President Kibaki's victory and had big plans for pushing for many pledges as politicians had promised during the campaigns.

My university always held its graduation celebrations between February and May each year, several months before the other sister campuses. As earlier stated, we did not experience strikes and closures as was the case with the other universities. JKUAT had a predictable timetable, a working almanac and students knew that they would indeed graduate within their stipulated study schedules. That was my pride and celebration for the 13 years I was at the helm of JKUAT.

The Shortest-Serving Chancellor

My graduation ceremony date was set for 24 March 2003. Council and Senate approved the date and expected I take charge of the rest. The date was soon after the 2002 elections and President Kibaki took office on 30 December.

We settled for the date with state functionaries and it was my duty to arrange for the ceremony. It is instructive to point out here that the remaining four public universities' graduation ceremonies would be presided over by President Kibaki in his official capacity as the new Chancellor. But their turns would come much later after ours. This was the understanding as per the individual university Acts. It is also worth noting that President Kibaki came into power on a Democratic Party ticket and KANU was no longer in power. It had been thoroughly humiliated at the 2002 general elections and many of its staunch supporters did not register any wins for their favoured candidates.

During the 2002 presidential campaigns, Mwai Kibaki had a road accident and one of his legs suffered fractures which had far-reaching effects even after recovery. I have had to recall this because we had to walk some distance to Graduation Square and also climb up the stairs for lunch. I had also spoken with him during one of my visits at the State House and confirmed that all would be okay despite the fractured leg.

Elaborate arrangements were therefore necessary to convince his aides and security that His Excellency could access both venues with ease. We succeeded in this assurance. And I had direct access to Mwai Kibaki just as I had had to the former Chancellor, Daniel Arap Moi. But this was for a brief period.

Elaborate preparations were in place for the 10th graduation ceremony at JKUAT on 24 March 2003. I saw the then State House comptroller, Mr Kereri Matere, and secretary to the cabinet, Mr Francis Muthaura, who were supportive

of the function. This was going to be President Kibaki's first public function after winning the general election. It was, therefore, an opportunity His Excellency' to share his views as he made his inaugural speech. The Council and the Senate were happy that we were allowed to go ahead with the 24 March graduation ceremony.

Robing the Second Chancellor

In 1994 when JKUAT was declared a fully-fledged university, I had had the privilege of robing the president and awarding him an honorary degree of Doctor of Science (*Honoris causa*). It was therefore an easy task for me. The Senate had met under my chairmanship and had agreed to award President Kibaki the said degree which was also endorsed by the full Council chaired by the acting chairperson, Dr Davy Koech, since Dr Stephen Mulinge had passed on. The other details like the citation and making of the gown were left to me and my top management to deal with. Luckily, I am a fast mover and time-conscious when it comes to accomplishing challenging tasks.

I made an appointment to visit the State House to take the measurement of President Mwai Kibaki for the ceremonial gown and also to request for his CV for the citation. I was granted permission to take his measurements, assisted by a university tailor. I was also given his draft CV with all details on his bio data. I set up a committee chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (AA) to polish the speech and citation appropriately.

When I visited the State House, President Kibaki was very receptive and responsive. He called me into the room where he was recuperating after the road accident. We had very good discussions and we even recalled when we used to meet in the past.

We particularly referred to the time when he came home to Kisii for the funeral of my late uncle, former minister James Nyamweya, and how I was host to him and Mr Joseph Munyao. He recalled the heavy rainfall we experienced on the burial day. All along, I had kept him and his company until the funeral service and burial ended. During this State House visit, the first lady, Madam Lucy Kibaki, was around and so she joined us for tea.

The university tailor and I took the measurements for the presidential gown. I collected a copy of his CV from the secretary and off we went. Mr Kireri Materi and Mr Francis Muthaura were in attendance all through, cracking jokes. This was a month before the graduation time. The gown had to be ready in good time.

On 25 March 2003, just one day before the big event, I took the gown for the occasion to the president. I again met Mr Kireri and Mr F. Muthaura there. They informed me that they were on their regular briefs to the Head of State of state. My mission to the State House this time was to brief the Chancellor-to-be. I had to explain to him the role of Chancellor and how I would robe him. I feared any embarrassment during the prestigious occasion.

Mark you; this was the first time for him to appear to preside at such a function. Moreover, he was still limping since the accident. He had not fully recovered, and so I had to be very careful. I actually had to perform a brief rehearsal in State House as we recalled the past meetings we had had.

At the same time, we talked about the meeting I chaired in Green Hills Hotel, Nyeri, where he attended with all MPs from Central Kenya to discuss the province's development agenda and politics. I chaired it because I was a Vice-Chancellor of a university located in Central Province.

In fact during this meeting, I slipped off a stair and had a fracture on my right foot. I had to use crutches for six months. I recall travelling to Nakuru from Nyeri and my foot kept on swelling without my realization that I had suffered a fracture on metatarsal five.

During that meeting at the State House, Mr Kereri Matere was talking a lot and he dominated the conversation. That was perhaps his nature. I remember him asking about high government positions for his people. I did not know how to respond to the demands since Mr Francis Muthaura, who was the head of the Civil Service was in a better position to assist. However, we shared with him details about JKUAT and its programmes.

I kept my informal talk brief because my aim was to get back to the university and finalize preparations for the next day. I knew that if there was any hitch, I would be the ultimate victim. Good planning of events reflects seriousness of the respective management. I left State House at about midday and went back to JKUAT, very anxious to witness the installation of my second Chancellor the following day. This was going to be another memorable moment and I really looked forward to it.

A Terse News Announcement

On the eve of our tenth graduation ceremony, I got a phone call from a colleague asking me if I had listened to the 4 pm news. I had not. I wondered why he asked me the question.

I decided to continue with my preparations and wait for the 6 pm news brief. I did not imagine what kind of announcement would be aired at 4 pm other than that of the graduation ceremony. Normally, when the Head of State of state is about to visit or tour a place, his itinerary is announced to the public. I thought that it was my function that my colleague was perhaps referring to. It turned out not to be the one! Instead, it was a bombshell: that I had been removed from JKUAT as a Vice-Chancellor and appointed to head the little-known parastatal called the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) as a Director-General.

Confusion Reigns at the Eve of Graduation

My appointment to JKUAT as a Deputy Vice-Chancellor (academic affairs) in December 1989 was a sudden announcement. It was a pleasant 1 pm news bulletin

on a national radio station, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, and several other stations. A colleague of mine relayed the message to me as I was winding up a lecture to my third-year of a crop protection course, weed science. The announcement for me to quit JKUAT for NEMA on 25 March 2003 was, again, relayed at 4 pm on the local radio station, KBC. Again, a colleague passed on the message to me. This was a huge surprise.

First, I was not sure whether the message was meant for me or some other Vice-Chancellor since I had a graduation ceremony the following day, 26 March 2003. Decency dictated that I should have been informed several months earlier to prepare for a respective departure. The news went around the country like a bush fire and I got calls from everywhere soon after the 7 pm news. I was still at the campus putting the final touches for the big day.

I called my wife, Esther, immediately and told her of the interesting but ridiculous timing of the change of leadership in JKUAT. She advised me not to quit but to continue with the preparations. I had also decided to go on and ignore the announcement for the time being. It was an announcement after all and arrangements had been made under my general guidance. I had to move on. It was much too late to alter anything!

I called the acting chairman of Council, Dr Davy Koech, and passed on the message. He had already received the news and was not sure which way to go. In fact he suggested that we do further consultations and I should not proceed with any further preparations. This was the only time when I totally rejected his proposal and affirmed my stand, to go ahead as planned and only take note of the announcement.

First, it was too late to change the programme and reverse the graduation date; parents had already arrived and camped in the compound. Second, we had also announced to the whole nation that there would be a graduation ceremony the following day. Third, all the graduands and their parents had already travelled to Nairobi and the environs of JKUAT for the celebrations. Most importantly, I had put in my time and energy for the ceremony. The Council and the Senate were set to receive the president.

All along, I kept asking myself what this last minute announcement meant. Was the abrupt change meant to embarrass me? Ridicule me? Test my tolerance or simply throw me off balance? None of these was evident. I vowed to perfect the ceremony notwithstanding the changes! It was now seven in the evening and I was still at the campus going round the very fine details like receiving the printed citations, ensuring that high table chairs were correctly labelled with names of distinguished guests. Most importantly, I had to assure the staff and students who may have heard the shocking news that all was okay and our graduation ceremony would go on as scheduled. I was focused on this matter.

I left the office for my house in Spring Valley in Nairobi. The driver dropped me and we agreed that he would come for me the following morning by seven. I found

my wife, Esther, and our children having supper but evidently worried about the unfolding events. I was at ease with myself as I got into the house and repeatedly told them that we would continue with our ceremony despite the announcement.

My wife served me dinner and she may have noticed some concern on my face. But I still assured her and the children that there was nothing to worry about regarding the events of the following day. I had not received any communication from either the Minister of Education, George Saitoti (now deceased) or from State House operatives. In my case, my staff and students were all set for the event. As usual, my wife had to attend the graduation ceremony.

Despite all these personal assurances, several phone calls were coming in as people enquired whether there was still a graduation ceremony. I firmly said yes, please attend. My invitees doubted the legality of the function. But I still insisted that a letter and gazette notice were the final authority to adhere to.

I did not imply that I would not leave JKUAT. I was simply saying that my plans to have a successful graduation ceremony ought to go on! Period! After which I would gladly move on to NEMA.

Back in my house, I rehearsed my speech as usual, which I thought was very good, touching all facets of national development and industrialization. I also implored the new government to look into the plight of university staff in terms of poor salaries and continuous brain drain. I amended my speech accordingly, toned down on some aspects of my future plans and assured the graduands of a bright future.

I made the speech shorter than I had originally planned. I called the acting chair of Council and all Council members to advise them to attend the ceremony. I made reference to the announcement and further assured them that it would be futile for us to cause confusion on the eve of the great day. I then retired for the night.

The following day my driver, Mr Joshua Maina, arrived early and off we drove some 46 kilometres away. I left my wife at home, expecting her to join me later at the graduation square. The morning of 26 March 2003 was more uncertain. I found several students outside my office asking what was going on.

I addressed them briefly and told them that my term as their Vice-Chancellor had come to an end, and I had to move to NEMA after the graduation ceremony. They wanted to demonstrate against the move, but I advised them that changes were normal although they called for decency in effecting them. I was addressing students who still had more time to stay in school.

I told them that the graduands deserved peace and enjoyment as this was their ceremony, together with their families. I pleaded with the students to let me complete my day's programme successfully and thereafter proceed to NEMA. It was not a big deal but simply a change in roles, I asserted. The students then dispersed and joined the rest at the graduation square.

As the morning progressed, invited guests started to arrive. Several dignitaries, parents and guardians seemed to quietly talk about the previous announcement.

But the only person who was openly furious about the move was the then Minister for Education, Prof. George Saitoti. He approached me and stated that he had not been consulted about the transfer or change. He thought I had all along known but kept it a secret. It was not true. I told him that the announcement came as a surprise to me too. I, however, assured him that all would be well. In the meantime, my wife arrived and I acknowledged her presence as she was ushered to the pavilion by staff.

At about 9 am, my successor, Prof. Nick Wanjohi, arrived at the main administrative block. I had never met him before. He walked to me and introduced himself as the new Vice-Chancellor who was to take over from me. He actually thought that I would summarily hand over to him my graduation attire, the speech and all other instruments of authority immediately.

I was very diplomatic and handed him over to my registrar (AA) to usher him to the pavilion just like all other dignitaries. I knew protocol would not allow me to just surrender the whole graduation programme, including the inauguration of the second Chancellor of the University, to him since he had not officially taken over as VC. He was escorted there as the education minister, acting chairman of Council, Vice-Chancellors and myself waited in my office for the president to arrive.

The president and his entourage arrived and, as usual, we received him. He limped a bit as he walked and I talked to him, first wishing him a quick recovery and welcoming him to the great University. He was accompanied by the first lady, Lucy, whom I had met earlier and so it was easy for me to relate to her. We all sat in the room and tea and soft drinks were served. Again no reference was made to the immediate changes. I remained cool and extremely composed all along in my interactions with the Head of State of state. Maybe he had forgotten the announcement as everything seemed normal.

After a few minutes, when I noted some silence, and all had taken some drink, I announced that we all parade and form a procession. It was not a Chancellor's procession yet because he had not been robed as the new Chancellor. The rest of us were already dressed in the graduation gowns. I had told His Excellency the same the previous day and so he was aware of this procedure.

We all marched to the graduation square and took our seats. Being my tenth graduation ceremony, I was fully aware of the proceedings and protocols that such an event called for. Citing the relevant section of the University Act, I announced the 10th Congregation of JKUAT graduation ceremony. I further announced the Inauguration of the second Chancellor of JKUAT. The crowd sat pensively as I made the announcements.

After the national anthem by the Police Band, I read the relevant section which allows the Senate to award an honorary degree. I read the P resident citation and requested him to please stand up and step forward. The Acting Chairman of Council

and myself robed the president and declared him JKUAT's Second Chancellor. The congregation appreciated him as the Police Band played fanfare music. He was my first graduand that time and we were ready to proceed with the rest of the formalities.

At the same period, the Senate had identified Prof. Risley Thomas Odhiambo (now deceased) for an honorary degree for the great scientific and innovative work that he had done. He was the founder of the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE). Senate was very selective in its award of honorary degrees. We wanted to ensure that quality was the driving consideration in all our academic undertakings.

I was the first one to make the graduation speech before the Acting Chair of Council, Minister of Education and the new Chancellor. I confidently stood up, bowed to the newly-installed Chancellor and proceeded to the podium. I knew that this would be my last official speech in this university. The nation was perhaps watching my reaction keenly and monitoring what I would say as my parting words. They were in for a surprise. Normalcy prevailed!

I had changed my speech to highlight the many positive things that I had accomplished. I praised the international community for their support in various ways. I particularly singled out JICA and the Japanese government for the grants they gave the university which had assisted in technical, capital and human development.

I emphasized the university's financial gains because we now had substantial funds in our bank accounts. I mentioned by name the PhD students who were going to graduate that day as part of my great effort for availing scholarships to them. I also gave a brief narration of the successful story of placing JKUAT students. My milestones were many. Availability of jobs for my graduates was not an issue then.

We trained quality and not quantity. I gained immense courage and thrashed at the low salary packages for lecturers in public universities, and got applause on this score. I further deplored the unfortunate trend of Kenya's increasing poverty due to poor planning. Again I made no reference to the changes. I had known all along that public appointments were temporary and it was time for me to move on. This was perhaps one of my best speeches that I had ever delivered to a graduation congregation. The Chancellor spoke and made no reference to my job transfer. Later, my staff and students highly commended me for the wonderful and inspiring speech.

The graduation ceremony went on smoothly and all those scheduled to speak in the programme did so. I then called my Deputy Vice-Chancellor (academic affairs) to request the deans and directors to present the graduands for the award of diplomas and conferment of degrees. Within a period of two hours, we were through and I declared the congregation dissolved, again citing the relevant section of the University Act.

We left the podium and went for lunch. It was a bit difficult for the Chancellor to climb the stairs, but he slowly moved and made it to the dining room. The First lady, Mama Lucy, assisted him climb up the stairs. I sat next to the Chancellor and

the vice-chair sat on the other side of the table. We shared a few issues as we enjoyed having the meal.

I recall His Excellency telling me of the good work that I had done in JKUAT, a statement he had made earlier at the graduation square. He now repeated it during lunch. I appreciated the compliment but still felt let down by the abrupt announcement of my job transfer.

The Chancellor made a lot of remarks soon after lunch. In fact he talked more here than during the ceremony at the pavilion. At some point, Mama Lucy, advised me to request him to wind up the speech. I could not respond. I thought it would be impolite. I therefore sat pensively and simply surveyed the guests as they all marvelled at the length and the impromptu content of the president's chat. I finally thanked the guests for gracing the occasion and requested them to leave at their own pleasure. I had at least hosted my second Chancellor for a few hours while I was still in JKUAT.

My guests, parents and students stayed around taking photos and sharing the happy moments. My wife and I mingled with staff and students and exchanged pleasantries until about 4 pm when I decided to know the exact genesis of the hurried job placement. I was told by a high-ranking officer from the State House that they wanted to create a space for their staunch supporters. I was then moved to a little-known, non-functional and inactive environmental authority. That was the public's perception. That was the only reason. I had no qualms and decided to comply.

I met my successor, Prof. Nick Wanjohi, and agreed to meet within the shortest time possible for the handing over. I asked my staff in various departments to write handing over notes for me. Meanwhile, I would take Prof. Nick Wanjohi around the campus to introduce him to the staff. Within three days, all reports were ready. I was particularly interested in the proper financial accounts documentation. The university had accumulated substantial amounts of money from various savings to use for capital and staff development.

I called the Council members to witness the handing over report to the incoming Vice-Chancellor. I also handed over all the university instruments: the Mace, the Logo, the Seal, the Act and Statutes. All these were done in the university boardroom with the Council witnessing.

I packed my few personal effects and had them delivered to my house. It was a smooth transition despite the sudden indecent announcement. I had no ill feelings whatsoever as I moved onto other national engagements. I knew that every hiccup had a positive image.

Reflections

The sudden announcement of change of guard was comparable to the first news I got when I was appointed as a deputy principal. It was a good surprise in December 1989. But the 25 March 2003 announcement was done with no regard for my feelings.

I considered the move to be primitive since it lacked human consideration. Human beings have esteem, plans and visions. Any sudden destabilization, therefore, leaves bitter memories even if the action was well-intended. Graduation ceremonies require careful planning and they do consume the Vice-Chancellor's time. Any disruption of the process does affect the entire system. Hence, any abrupt transfers or appointments of any kind should surely have a human face! The appointing authorities know all this too well.

I had my mentees in JKUAT whom I very much respected. The staff and the Council members whom I worked with liked my accomplishments. My belief in leaving a place better than you found it had now made sense. Here was a campus I had nurtured for several years as the chief executive. I had learnt a lot from the process. Certainly, I was very proud of the accomplishment.

I had two great institutions in one, the university and AICAD, both engineered by me with unwavering support from the Council and the Senate. In the process, I trained several persons who now manage almost all the current fully-fledged universities. I had earlier alluded to them. They are part of my legacy, and part of my pride considering that my services at JKUAT lasted a whole 13 years.

Informal Farewell

A day before I finally left JKUAT, and after handing over to my successor, I decided to bid farewell to my staff in the departments. I felt that it was inhumanly unfair to just leave the campus without quickly and promptly seeing them at their work stations. I remember visiting the farm workers, kitchen staff, security, water treatment personnel, the library, the hospital, the examination centre, halls of residence personnel, a few academic departments and finally AICAD office. This was my informal farewell visit.

I wished all of them well and promised that I would always cherish them. My parting words were simple, "*my sincere thanks to you all.*" I was only leaving JKUAT for a more involving parastatal which dealt with all matters of the environment. They were welcome to visit my offices located off Mombasa Road in Nairobi South C. It was just that simple.