

Promise Tracker

The **Promise Tracker** is Daily Monitor's weekly special feature that tracks the promises made by leaders of all categories as well as public agencies to the people. The aim is to cause accountability, show status and analyse whether it was a realistic, unrealistic or empty promise.

Govt fulfils varsity pledge to West Nile



Commissioning. President Museveni waves to the academic staff of Muni University during the opening of the institution in 2016. PHOTO BY FELIX KAMUKWEMU

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THE PROMISE: In the run up to the 2006 General Election, the ruling NRM party announced its commitment to what it described as qualitative and quantitative expansion of university education.

The party's manifesto for 2006-2011 specifically mentioned establishing a new public university in eastern Uganda.

However, government had initially offered to establish a constituency college of Gulu University in West Nile but political leaders and educationists in the sub-region rejected the offer.

When Mr Museveni, the NRM flagbearer, went on the campaign trail in West Nile region, which was at the time in the hands of Opposition Forum for Democratic Change, the electorate demanded the university.

He promised to establish a fully-fledged public university in the region.

During a memorial service for the late Koboko MP, Francis Ayume, in July 2008, which was presided over by President Museveni, it was announced that the university would

soon open and would have a faculty of law named after the deceased.

Ayume served as Solicitor General during Amin's regime before joining elective politics in the 1990s.

He also served as Attorney General and Speaker of Parliament under the NRM government. He died in a road accident in Nakasongola District on the Kampala-Gulu highway in 2004.

The Ministry of Education sent out a circular to leaders in West Nile in July 2009, indicating that it had allocated Shs700m towards commencement of the project.

However, the then Education minister, Ms Geraldine Namirembe Bitamaze, did not state when it would begin which unsettled the regional leaders.

Mr Richard Fesus Andama, the Arua District chairperson, who claimed to be speaking on behalf of his colleagues in West Nile, told journalists in August 2009 that some technocrats in the ministry were frustrating the project.

"The President directed that the university be opened in April this year (2009), but it has not. We must meet the President and ask him to intervene because he ordered the fast-tracking of the opening but nothing has happened," Mr

THE OFFICIAL POSITION

Prof Christine Dronzo, the Muni University vice chancellor, says the institution has made the promise of techno-science education a reality.

"This is the future we all want for Uganda's graduates - globally competitive and skilled. When some of the students represented Uganda in China and Nigeria, it was a demonstration of their joint capability to deliver. When some of them remained home to repair computers, it was still a demonstration of their capabilities," the online publication, *West Nile Web* quoted her saying.

Prof Dronzo, however, cited limited funds from government, saying it is impeding efforts to increase infrastructure. The university is meant to have constituent colleges in each district of West Nile. Some districts have already made land available. Panyimur has offered land for a constituent college for oil and mineral studies, Zombo for a constituent college for agriculture and Palimwach for business studies.

In June 2012, Dr Epiphany Odubaker, the Muni University secretary, announced that the institution, would start off by offering science courses, including Information Communication Technology (ICT), Bachelor of Science with Education and Bachelors of Nursing.

It would also be expected to admit students in the academic year 2012/2013.

The opening, however, did not go as planned as admissions were deferred. Ambitious, a company which was contracted in 2012 to construct to the administration block, hostels and lecture rooms at a tune of Shs1.6b had not completed the work by June 2014, the deadline.

The company blamed the delays on government's failure to remit the funds in time.

In September 2014, the university opened its doors with 200 students, out of which 100 were on government sponsorship.

It was, however, not until September 2016 that President Museveni officially opened the institution.

"I have commissioned Muni University in Arua District and installed its first chancellor, Dr Eric Adiko," President Museveni

tweeted shortly after the function.

Shs1.6b

Shortfall. The amount of money Muni University fell short of in the financial year 2018/2019.

169

Graduates. Number of people who have graduated from Muni University since its inception. It has had two graduation ceremonies so far.

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SPECIAL REPORT



Education. Muni University campus in Arua District. PHOTO BY FELIX KAMUKWEMU

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However, the institution's growth is being hampered by underfunding from government.

For example, the university was meant to have introduced courses in Business Management and Entrepreneurship and Agriculture for the academic year 2018/2019 but was compelled to defer admission of students for those courses even though they had been approved by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE).

Prof Christine Dronzo, the vice chancellor, said admissions were put on hold because the institution had been hit by a funding shortfall of Shs1.6b.

At the same time, the university is underfunded. The Rev Fr Epiphany Odubaker Picho, the university secretary, was recently quoted saying that whereas it has capacity to admit up to 3,000 students and run more than 20 academic programmes, it has less than 400 because it has very few academic programmes.

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