

Makerere strike bites beyond staff

Dull. On-campus streets that teem with vendors selling scholastic materials, airtime or transacting in mobile money, are deserted.

BY DERRICK WANDERA
& DAMALI MUKHAYE
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. A strike by staff has paralysed activities at Makerere University for the third week of what should be the first semester of a new academic year.

A survey by this newspaper, however, reveals that parties not directly responsible for the industrial action are counting losses, with no resolution of the impasse in sight.

Up to 36,000 students at the institution have lost almost one-quarter of the learning time during the semester, parents are receiving new bills while sparring administrators and other employees are pressing the button of destruction for themselves and the varsity.

Business

The usually thriving eateries, nicknamed *Kikumi Kikumi* for its cheap offering, is a shadow of itself.

Mr Charles Bukenya, a food vendor, said he had by midday only sold one plate of chapatti-beans meal worth Shs1,500.

"I can hardly earn half of what I am supposed to earn," he said.

His average Shs80,000 daily earning has plummeted to only Shs5,000.

The situation is no different for Ms Miriam Kichoncho, a shop owner. On good days, she would make Shs900,000 or more. Now, her take home from the business is down to Shs350,000 per day.

"Most of them (students) have gone home; so, our businesses [are at] stand still. We work complementarily with the people who own small eating places; they book our merchandise to make lunch and supper for the students, but they are not here," she said.

On-campus streets that teem with vendors selling scholastic materials, airtime or transacting in mobile money, are deserted. Makerere is lifeless and ghostly.

Although it remains unclear how many of the 1,500 academic and 1,760 non-teaching staff sat and agreed on industrial action, all now feel its bite. A proposal for headcount and threat by university administration to sack non-compliant lecturers presents job insecurity.

Staff are on tension as uncertainty lingers about resumption of teaching and their own fate. There is a potential the matter will end up in court, taking resources and the university's attention away from its core role as an intellectual hub and knowledge generator.

Suspension of some staff has injected suspicion and instability in Makerere University Academic Staff Association (Muasa).

Dr Edward Mwavu, the association's acting chairperson, admitted yesterday that they had reached no compromise in spite of multiple meetings with administrators.

Many of the 36,000 students have already paid tuition and other functional fees, but are not being taught or receiving the auxiliary services.



Idle. A food dealer outside Makerere University takes a nap due to lack of customers. PHOTOS BY KELVIN MUBARE



Empty classrooms. A student takes a nap in one of the lecture rooms of College of Technology.

The non-residents have paid anywhere between Shs650,000 to Shs1,500,000 in rent for the semester's four months. They spend on food and personal upkeep.

Ms Martha Mirembe, a second-year student at the College of Business and Management Sciences, said that they have been idle at their hostels yet are spending a lot.

Students stranded

"Most of the time, we are at our hostels doing nothing and we tend to spend a lot because when you are at school, spending reduces," she said.

"We are scared of our time for industrial training being affected should the university postpone the semester," Ms Mirembe added.

Students were also anxious about whether the teaching time lost for no fault of their own, would be compensated and how.

Three students studying Education; Henry Ssendawula, Mike Matovu and Charles Bukenya said they spend a lot of transport fare and feeding since they commute from home on a daily basis only to find no lectures.

By press time, parents were finalising arrangements to sue the institu-

SECURITY AT CAMPUS

Both police and army are heavily deployed on campus, taking the former away from law and order duties in crime-infested neighbourhoods. They have to be provided meals and fuel for motorized tour on and around the campus.

"We are doing our work. What if some people vandalise university property or attack students who want to read? We are always alert on this and we shall be there until the situation normalises. We don't want to take things for granted," Mr Patrick Onyango, the Kampala Metropolitan Police spokesperson, said.

tion and the Vice Chancellor for the damages suffered.

The parents reasoned that if they have provided all the requirements for the university, it was unfair that their children were not being taught.

Mr Lawrence Bukenya, the one heading the plot for a legal recourse,

said he was concerned about the universities negligence to restore tranquility and normal operations.

"We have paid a lot of money already, our children are just sleeping and this is a big temptation to them. We need to get an explanation about this and we shall sort this in court," Mr Bukenya said.

He said he paid Shs1.3m for his daughter's tuition, Shs800,000 for accommodation, Shs300,000 for meals and at least Shs500,000 for additional expenses.

"If the semester is extended, it means we shall incur more and yet we are not sure whether the students will be able to cover what they are supposed to cover in four months given the remaining three months," he said.

On-and-off lectures

There was partial teaching ongoing at the College of Health Sciences, College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (CEDAT) and the College of Veterinary Medicine.

The School of Law is closed for teaching, with lecturers notifying the university administration in writing that they would only resume teaching if their demands were met.

There was staggered students-lecturer interactions at four other colleges.

Top management led by the Vice Chancellor, Prof Barnabas Nawangwe, are on tenterhooks because they have to balance the pressure to have the university resume full operation with expectations of other stakeholders and, most importantly breaking the impasse with striking employees.

Damaged reputation

The repeated strikes present Makerere's governance problems as intractable, eroding its image and standing as the country's premier institution.

This, according to some members of convocation, can become a turn off for parents and guardians intending to send their children to study at the Ivory Tower.