



# Makerere pay and tuition woes dangerous signal of times ahead

**KAROLI SSEMOGERERE > TALKING POINT**

**M**akerere University was the scene of running battles recently caused by demonstrating students protesting the automatic tuition increase policy. There was a public outcry against excessive use of force, running battles between security agencies, arrests, detentions and other forms of high-handedness.

At the core of the grievances was a compact to bring Makerere tuition in 2018 to "market" level. Market level required annual raises of 15 per cent (three times the official rate of inflation of 5 per cent). The tuition increase would fund establishment and payroll. Makerere's annual subvention from government is Shs300b of which 56 per cent goes to payroll.

Government has been increasing payroll without increasing the size of this pot. In 2019/2020, the vice chancellor earns Shs12m, a full professor between Shs9m and 10m depending on specialty and so on. These numbers while modest compared to what is on the market, cannot compensate for years of chronic underpay that have deprived Makerere of human resource.

To its credit, years of pay abuse have not written off Makerere, which still has a formidable work force. However, Makerere is suffering from other problems. First, Makerere does not enjoy full autonomy from government. Government technically meets payroll even though Makerere remits income to government and Makerere receives payroll, which it posts. Second, salaries at Makerere are subject of negotiation between the head of State and government

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and a host of interests, itself an anachronistic practice. It is almost impossible to pinpoint any credible university that still runs things this way. Payroll anxiety attached to these raises which have already by implication been rescinded by Council, can only serve to create more instability.

A rising pay envelope is squeezing money from Makerere's obligation to provide a safe physical environment to its students. It's a question for the public as to whether KCCA's director of physical planning has inspected and issued occupation permits for Makerere's halls of residence, which are in a state of derelict, disrepair and should no longer be physically habited. This is both a safety and public health issue.

Makerere over the years has become a specialist centre for adhoc bodies. It has a number of tribunals, staff, disciplinary whose roles are duplicitous and eat further into the resources of the university. The size of Council provided for in the law is for a different era. Makerere cannot remain in the past without adopting executive management. The Minister of Education seemed to miss public anger as she gave her imprimatur to squeezing the students while the public saw the bursting of waste elsewhere.

There are very few studies on university affordability. There is a presumption that since parents shoulder the cost of education up to K13, they can automatically afford to pay for specialist and professional courses, which cost three times or more of regular school fees plus the subsistence cost of attending university.

In fact, the newer universities may be a bargain compared to Makerere smack in the centre of Kampala. The minister must consider an independent study of Makerere retaining an avenue for merit students who have met a certain academic requirement to retain access to higher education through a grant, not a loan. The study should also look at moderating the outflow of students to more affordable institutions in India, China, Turkey, and Malaysia. This is net outflow of vital foreign exchange. The day people started to travel abroad for toothache, the equity in the medical system died.

Lastly, there is the penultimate issue of use of force. After so many years, has police failed to develop tools of crowd control. Why should beating up unarmed persons be a pleasure joy achieved at great cost? Where is the well-dressed man in colourful ties, Medi Ssozi Kaggwa, when we need him, the affable well-meaning chairman of the Human Rights Commission?

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