



TOUGH TIMES: A student at the university preparing a meal in a congested room. Right - a burnt room. Consequences of such activities are fire outbreaks in halls of residence at universities (Pictures courtesy People Daily)

Hostels turned into business outlets

By Noelina Nabwire and Mugure Kihika

Computer bureaus. Tuckshops littered with food-stuffs. Barber shops and saloons. These are permanent features at the entrance of every hall of residence at the University of Nairobi's Main campus.

Upon entering the halls of residence, one is left wondering whether it is a business or a learning institution. So strategically placed are the businesses that one cannot miss their presence. Their services range from typing and printing to hair styling and shaving.

Businesses have changed the serenity of the institution. Its surprising that students can cope with both business management and studies at the same time.

Business enterprises began in 1999 following the demolition of slums and other kiosks by city council *askaris* and provincial administration. The kiosks were both a security risk and a health hazard. Alternatives had to be found to cater for what the kiosks had been providing - supplying students' basic items. This saw the introduction of tuckshops and other business ventures.

The Customer Relations Officer, Mr Fred Oluoch, says that business ventures were also seen as a way of helping needy students generate money for fees and upkeep. He added that every hall has a tuckshop and a pool table.

"One wonders whether a poor student who cannot afford Shs 3,000 accommodation fee per semester can afford 30,000 to start a shop?" poses Oluoch.

He prefers the work study programme, saying that it truly identifies needy students and has been applied successfully.

Rent charged for tuckshops, barber shops and pool tables range from Shs 2,500 - 3,000, while computer bureaus and saloons go for Kshs 7,000. There are more than 42 halls in the entire University. Some have more than two shops and pool tables depending on the student population. The Students Welfare Authority (SWA), which lets the businesses, earns more than Kshs 200,000 per month in rent.

Students, most of whom rely on the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB), term business

enterprises as a saviour. They cite affordability as the main reason why they prefer services within campus. "My final year project is over 200 pages, you do not expect me to pay around ten thousand, the amount charged by computer operators in town," says Eunice Murambi, a final year sociologist student. She says that she pays a third of the amount at the university bureaus.

Concurring with Ms Murambi, Ms Kanyo says that she cannot afford the high costs charged by saloons in town and prefers the cheaper ones at the university. "Saloons at Anniversary Towers, the nearest to campus charge triple the amount charged at the university."

She adds: "in fact such saloons are a outrageous and enemies of development! How can one expect a student to afford five hundred shillings for treatment?"

Saying that the services are within their reach and convenient, some students threaten that closure of such ventures are likely to lead to a riot. "I have a tight work schedule. I have classes from 9.00 a.m to 5.00 p.m, the only time I have for my thesis is at night," says a masters student at the university who preferred anonymity. He says that with these facilities at his disposal, he can work at any time of the night including weekends.

While students like Kanyo and Murambi benefit as customers, others are suppliers. Mr Mugo, an MSc student at Chiromo campus, says he has been in the business for two years now. He runs a computer bureau at the Main Campus, where he offers typing, printing, scanning, telephone, photocopy and e-mail services. "I saw the opportunity after I realised that students had to go all the way to town to print their work where the rates are very expensive."

The ventures not only benefit students but also non-students as they offer employment opportunities. Mugo, for instance, has employed five people who manage his business. Asked why he ventured into business rather than concentrating on studies, he said that he is a business minded person and was just looking for a viable opportunity. He had been in business before, running a quarry, an inheritance from his father.

Beauticians have not been left behind. Stu-

dents do not have to go outside the campus to get some of these services. "We only charge Kshs 180/= for treatment as compared to Kshs 250-500/= in town" says Brenda, a beautician at the *Eye on Style Beauty Parlour*, located in the women's hall.

Services offered in the saloon range from relaxing, treatment, facials, pedicure, manicure, and barbering. There are three employees at the saloon who are paid between Shs 5,000 and 8,000 per month.

Tailoring has also curved its niche. The services are indeed cheap if what they are charging is anything to go by. Charges for lady skirt and trouser suits range from Shs 400 to Shs 1,300.

Complaining that the business is not so good, Mr Obado, the proprietor of *Ujuzi Tailoring shop*, who has been in the business for one year, says that they sometimes do not realise any profits. Asked why he was still in an unprofitable business, Bado said that the business also served as his residential place.

Fearing publication, the proprietor of a barber

Three years after Isabel was declared healed of tuberculosis (TB), the disease emerged again making her unable to walk or eat.

Isabel had been given a half of the recommended TB dosage, and she had felt absolutely better. Now, the disease sprang gain. After battling it for nine months, doctors said she was not responding to drugs. Days later, her TB was declared as resistant to drugs.

More than a half a million was needed for treatment of her drug resistant TB compared to free services offered by the government in the treatment of normal cases. Unable to raise the money, Isabel eventually died.

The Director of Medical Services, Dr. Richard Muga, says it can cost the government an estimated Shs 800,000 to treat a multi-drug resistant TB individual compared to Sh. 15,000 for normal TB case.

But now, the likes of Isabel might not die, as a recent scientific breakthrough may avail affordable drugs to treat resistant TB.

Traces of victory are emerging, after over 20 years of spirited war against the drug resistant tuberculosis. The recent sequencing of the genome of the bacterium that causes the dis-

shop was reluctant to reveal any information. On assurance that the information was not for the mainstream media, he agreed on condition that his name would not be used. He has employed two people whom he pays on commission basis.

Most businesses operating within the university said they recorded between 20 and 50 per cent profit per month. Not everything is rosy for the business proprietors, as they too experience problems.

The main problem is experienced during university closures, since most of their customers are students. Mr Bado says that he normally closes down his business when the University is not in session, but he still pays rent during these times. Though not a big problem, frequent power black outs also disrupt the businesses.

The administration on their part has to contend with the problems that come with the ventures. Mr Oluoch expressed fears over the unhygienic conditions of the edibles sold in tuckshops. Although tuckshops were meant to sell manufactured goods, cooked food is sold.

Intrusion by outsiders is another problem. Needy students are used by members of the public to facilitate business opportunities for them. The intrusion also poses security risk.

While students find themselves at crossroads - whether to study or make money for subsistence - some people think their major responsibility is to study.

Emphasising the importance of concentrating fully on studies, Mr Oluoch, advises students that their concern should be books. The businesses, he says, should be a way of supplementing their income.

Genome sequenced

By Arthur Okwamba

ease holds key to this success.

Scientists perceive this sequencing as a breakthrough, which will provide countries with a new arsenal to unlock the TB problem.

"The sequencing of the TB genome provides unprecedented hope of objectively developing new drugs with specific targets. This is because the information will help scientists determine the molecular basis of the bacterium as well as how it grows," says Prof Onesmo Ole-Moi Yoi, a genome expert and chairman of Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology in Africa.

Scientists are hopeful that the effective drugs will reduce the time and quantities taken to treat TB. At the moment, a person suffering from TB is required to take between 240 and 300 drugs for six months to eight months for complete treatment.

The present TB vaccine, BCG, is only effective in preventing some serious forms