

# Vice Chancellor outlines varsity policies



Prof Gichaga: "Government policy is for us to generate income to finance our operations" (Pic. courtesy Daily Nation)

Prof. Francis John Gichaga, 54, has been involved with the UoN since the 1960s as student to Vice Chancellor of "the mother of universities in Kenya." He speaks to THE ANVIL writer, JAMES MACHARIA.



**Q:** In 1991, the World Bank lent \$60 million (over KSh 250m then) for the creation of the Universities Investment Project in order to enable income generating projects to supplement government funds. Can you enumerate any such projects initiated at this university and account for how the credit has been utilised so far?

**A:** The World Bank loaned us this money on condition that we introduce the fees (initially Sh 6000) and the Pay As You Eat system, which led to the closure of the universities after student riots. However the money did not come because the Ministry of Finance failed to meet all the other conditions set by the Bank. Instead, it set up the Policy and Planning Task Group to work out a mechanism to use the money, to propose training programmes for our staff and students and the type of equipment in laboratories, computers and books required. The good news is that this equipment is finally available and we expect it any time this year. Each university has a percentage of the amount pledged by the World Bank.

**Q:** What of the income generation project?

**A:** The income generation project is not linked to the University Investment Project but it has come as a government policy for us to generate income to finance our operations. For example the Kibwezi Irrigation Project and extension services of selling technology to surrounding areas. Other projects are the bread bakery at Lower Kabete, farms and dairy cattle at Upper Kabete whose produce is sold to the university's kitchens through the Students Welfare Association (SWA). The Chiromo Mortuary is a good money earner which offers better services than the city mortuary and is run by the students, not necessarily medics in training, as well as the Mamlaka hostels which were designed partly by architecture and engineering students, having been allowed to do so by the University Council to help train them on the job. We are now going full throttle in allowing lecturers to charge consultancy fees for their services because we can no longer rely on the Exchequer to boost their salaries.

**Q:** How much do these projects contribute to the university's annual budget?

**A:** The actual figure is not easy to ascertain as it is hidden in the accounts, but with our budget at Sh 1 billion per year, we can roughly say that 20 per cent is raised by these projects some of which goes to salaries for the staff. The impact on lecturers in terms of cash in consultancy fees can be Sh 3000 or more for them, per client.

**Q:** The invention of the "Nyayo Pioneer" car by this university was viewed as an income generating project. Plans for a Sh 700 million assembly plant were mentioned. What happened next?

**A:** The project has remained confidential as a matter of government policy... so we cannot talk about it.

**Q:** Considering the huge amounts involved, why the silence?

**A:** We cannot discuss that one...

**Q:** Turning now to the issue of university fees, students pay a mandatory Sh 500 activity fee for sports and other extra curricular activities. Is this fair considering sports and such activities are for all practical purposes dead, unlike in the past?

**A:** (Laughing) We would like to have better facilities especially in Kikuyu campus and improve sports administration but we are proud of the Mean Machine rugby team and others. As for extra curricular activities, we financed a trip last year to Makerere University by the Faculties of Law and Arts but it is upon the students to come up with proposals to spend their money or they will fail to benefit.

**Q:** Since the new fee structure was introduced, all students also pay a non-refundable Sh 1000 medical fee. Why then should such monies not be reclaimed if one has not utilised the services, say if one does not fall sick?

**A:** We have had these complaints on the scheme so what we have done is improve the medical facilities so as to provide drugs and treatment. However, if a student does not fall sick we cannot refund the money. It is like insurance where one only uses the money if the need arises. On the other hand some stu-

dents fall ill and spend more than the Sh 1000 they paid when the university refers them for treatment in national hospitals. We have a lot of mental sickness problems which require specialised psychiatric treatment.

**Q:** But where do all the remaining funds, which are in millions of shillings go?

**A:** The fees structure does not provide for any form of refund process but the money which amounts to around Sh 12 million is used to meet other needs of emergency cases of sickness which arise. For instance we have a student who was seriously injured during a riot and required specialised treatment last.

**Q:** Is it true that the university is overcharging the students who now have to pay for their accommodation (Sh 35 per student per day)?

**A:** We are not overcharging the students but have not ignored their complaints. That is why we have appointed professionals to evaluate the rooms in the hostels to find out their value because we have cheap rock bottom priced rooms and also relaxed rooms. In the final analysis I am accountable to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in Parliament while presenting our annual budget on incomes and expenditure so I must justify any changes made on such charges.

As you know, the complaints have stated that the post-graduate students have an advantage over the under-graduates because they pay Sh 30 a day, but we will soon fix all these costs and you can expect a report on this issue soon, now that the evaluation team has just briefed me on their findings.

The SAPs have eaten into our economy with the introduction of cost-sharing so that if you do not have you continue not having, especially for the poor.

**Q:** What are you doing about the congestion in the lecture halls and hostels?

**A:** We do not have money to fulfil the planning of lecture halls like the two at Chiromo campus which on completion will sit 500 students each. Once we finish these plans we will give the university life for ten more years. We have had to choose: in the hostels, students can share but in the lecture theatres we have restricted admission. For example in the Faculty of Medicine the intake has remained at less than 15 students annually because of the few facilities and so as not to lower the standards. Where we have programmes which are equipment-intensive we do not allow for overcrowding for example in the engineering department.

However, it is a fact that tutorials are fewer and can be a cause of poor standards because of low contact hours with lecturers. This reflects in their performance but students are given time to make-up by doing supplementary exams which

they invariably pass, having few subjects to prepare for. Yes, we have crowded facilities but only in terms of accommodation.

**Q:** There have been persistent complaints by the press and the public that the academic standards at the university have fallen.

Is this true and if so why?

**A:** Who is a journalist to comment on the university standards and question a professor? I am the one who knows... Many people writing about standards going down are only trying to help a politician somewhere with his/her biased view as if he has the capacity to judge, which is not for the student or the public but the Senate. This is the custodian of the standards which raises signals to change the course of falling grades and demand a faculty or department to make up the lost ground.

PROFILE

## Kirwa: "Am I more opposition than the Opposition leaders?"

BY FARIDA KARONEY

Born in Nandi District 37 years ago, the youthful Kanu MP for Cherangani, Mr. Kipruto arap Kirwa is one of the 27 children in a polygamous family of four wives. He is the last born of his mother.

In the early 60s, the Nandis were displaced by the white settlers, forcing them to move into Tanzania and Uganda. Those who stayed in Kenya wandered into Masailand, especially Laikipia District. Kirwa's family moved to Tanzania in 1962 when he was only three years old. Ten years later, they moved back to Kenya, the white settlers having moved out since Kenya was then independent.

At the age of 13, young Kirwa joined Kaplamai Primary School in Kitale, sat his primary education examinations in 1976 and joined Mangu High School a year later. In 1981, Kirwa joined Kapsabet Boys High School where he did his "A" level studies. In 1983, the deviant Kanu legislator joined the then Jomo Kenyatta College of Agriculture and Technology for a diploma in agricultural engineering.

He left college in 1986 and taught as an untrained technical teacher at Tilol Secondary School in Uasin Gishu District. It was during his teaching career that Kirwa met his wife Josephine whom he married in April, 1988. They have two daughters and a son.

It was in the same year that Kirwa resigned from his teaching post to try his hand in politics. Speaking to *The Anvil* recently, the non-conformist legislator said "I always had a burning desire to be a politician." And so, during the infamous 1988 General elections, Kirwa declared his candidature for the Cherangani Parliamentary seat, challenging the late Masinde Muliro but according to the MP, "the papers disappeared somewhere in Kanu headquarters." Kirwa then 29 years, decided to go back to college.

He joined the Kenya Teachers Training College for a diploma in education



Kirwa: Democracy is not about switching camps at will"

was through with the course in time to vie for the same seat which had been declared vacant following the nullification of Masinde's election after a successful election petition. This time, at 30, mother luck smiled on Kirwa and he was elected member of Parliament for Cherangani Constituency.

So why did the straight-shooting legislator so badly want to join politics? In 1975 during the J.M. Kariuki saga which he followed closely, he felt that something was not correct with the political establishment. "Why wasn't somebody doing something about J.M.'s death?" he asked. It was then he felt he could make a change. Since then, at the back of his mind, he knew someday he had to be a politician. He was then 16. As a student in his college days at the Jomo Kenyatta College, he was the college council chairman, an elective post, always believing that life was meaningless unless one made a serious commitment.

After his successful election in 1989 Kirwa apparently had a "grace" period of one and a half years before he started feeling the political heat. According to him, his detractors started presenting a

different image of him to the President for their own political gain. The President became uncomfortable with his outspoken nature as early as 1991. Soon after the first multi-party polls in 1992, Kanu hardliners were at pains to portray Kirwa as a man in the wrong political camp, implying that he should be in the Opposition.

But the independent thinking MP strongly believes that democracy is not about switching camps at will, but about free expression of ideas and the right to speak for those he represents in Parliament. But what irked Kirwa most, sources say, was a meeting President Moi held in March this year with a group of 16 Cherangani constituents, led by AIC cleric, Rev. Silas Yego.

The meeting, according to informed sources, was convened for the express purpose of discussing how to "finish" Kirwa politically and to add insult to injury, the group was allegedly given a substantial sum of money.

According to the MP, the March meeting was not the first between the head of State and Rev. Yego. He was, in fact, a regular State House visitor. This coupled with the fact that the MP has on several occasions been denied licences to address public rallies, so incensed him that he decided to make his grievances public. Asked why he recently decided to tackle the President head-on, he said the statement "was a product of cumulative frustrations from opportunist church leaders and the Provincial Administration," apparently acting with the express permission of the head of State.

To this date, Kirwa says several licences with his name have been cancelled. Speaking to this writer, he posed rhetorically, "Am I more Opposition than the Opposition leaders who have been given licences?" the controversial Kanu MP who at one time dared the President to expel him from Kanu said that Kanu

"Who is a journalist to comment on the university standards and question a professor? I am the one who knows..."