

Plan for varsity in Coast underway

Coast leaders are working on plans to start a national university in the province next year.

At a recent meeting at Bandari College, a task force was formed to work out the modalities of establishing the sixth public university. It is led by Prof Juma Lugogo, a former deputy vice-chancellor of Engert University and now the managing director of the Coast Development Authority.

Others are former Moi University Vice-Chancellor Justin Irina, Dr J. B. Mwandotto of Moi University, Dr Mohammed Swazuri and a veteran educationist, Mr Samuel Maneno, who is now the Chairman of the Kenya Ports Authority.

The leaders argued that a specialised university on maritime studies should be started at the Coast. Such an institution would enhance regional integration.

Speakers at the meeting felt that Coast Province had the necessary infrastructure and human resources to sustain an institution of higher learning. In fact, as Mr Maneno put it: "We've been sleeping for so long and we have woken up at lunch time."

But questions arose during the meeting: Does Kenya need another university? If so, why in Coast Province?

What programmes would it offer? Would it not duplicate what is taught in other universities? Is the university going to be a Coast-only affair or a national institution?

Facts and figures adduced supported plans to start a university at the Coast. It was argued that the establishment of the university was not only necessary but long over-due.

It was postulated that the first university in Kenya should have been established at the Coast as it was the home of the pioneer

educators who set up the early learning institutions.

These institutions included the present day Waa Secondary School, which was started in 1923, a teachers college in Kilifi District among others. However, the training institutions later collapsed.

The present-day Mombasa Polytechnic was also initiated with the idea that it would be developed into a university. But this was never to be.

Presenting a paper on the proposed university, Dr Mwandotto, who has been doing the groundwork since 1993, said the 8-4-4 had brought university education within the reach of many secondary school leavers.

This is because there are more candidates who sit the university matriculation examination — the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education — than before. This means more universities are required to absorb the ever rising numbers.

In 1997, for instance, some 156,000 candidates sat the KCSE exam, out of whom 28,000 qualified for university admission. However, only 8,000 got admissions.

The implication is that there has been a steady growth in demand for the university education and yet the number of places at the universities has not grown at the same pace. The existing public universities cannot cope up with the demand.

It was also felt that a university at the Coast would bring higher education to the locals and enhance development of tourism and maritime activities.

There are some courses offered in the existing universities which would be more effectively taught at the coast. These include, marine ecology and tropical medicine.



A building at the Mombasa Polytechnic, which houses medical engineering department. Coast leaders want the polytechnic to be upgraded and made a university campus. (Picture by ADAM HUSSEIN)

Story by FRANCIS MWAKA

Studies show that to conduct studies like mariculture, Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KEMFRI) has to liaise with Free University of Belgium.

Equally, the Coast Development Authority (CDA) has to collaborate with University of Rhode Island in the US to implement the integrated coastal zone management programme. While about 60 per cent of Kenya's tourism is coast-based, the Coast Development Authority has to send its personnel to Israel for postgraduate studies in tourism.

It is envisaged that a university at the Coast will enhance research and development of the exclusive economic zone and environmental conservation in the region. In addition, aeronautics and space sciences could be developed in collaboration with the San Marco satellite launching centre in Malindi.

The leaders also argued that the infrastructure in the Coast Province was sufficient to sustain a university. The road networks, railway and tele-communication system are well developed in the region. Adequate supplies of electric power and fresh water are also guar-

anteed.

According to the leaders, the proposed institution will have no problem in acquiring land. The Government and local authorities have enough land and facilities, including KEMFRI, Shanzu Teachers Training college and Matuga District Development Centre, which could be used by the university.

Courses offered in these institutions could be taken over by Mombasa Technical Training Institute and the customs training centre.

It was observed that the coastal climate was ideal for courses like dryland and lowland farming, tropical agronomy and forestry, mariculture and tropical diseases.

Establishment of the university will ensure regional balance in the distribution of institutions higher learning.

The leaders outlined the following reasons for the establishment of the university:

- It will fill the gap in higher education.
- Enhance diversification of academic programmes.

The university is to be housed at different campuses. While the central administration would be



Prof Lugogo: Key role in task force



Prof Irina: Useful administrative skills

at the present Mombasa Polytechnic, the faculty of marine sciences and oceanography would be at the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute. Maritime business studies would be at the Bandari College while dryland farming at the Coast Institute of Technology in Voi. The school of tropical medicine would be at Mokowe Hospital in Lamu. This model has operated successfully in California and the University of Nairobi.

Other courses to be offered include aeronautics and space sciences, ceramics and pottery, mining and technology.

The leaders proposed that an interim council be formed next month to prepare a draft charter for the university.

They expect to get approval from the Commission For Higher Education by next January so that a development plan can be worked out. According to the work plan, a funds drive will be organised early next year to raise money to improve the facilities. Recruitment of staff and students is planned to by next June.

According to the leaders, the establishment of a university at the Coast is an idea whose time has come.