Is there way out of the cash crises?

By Khumba Kamotho

LAST week, University of Nairobi Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Francis Gichaga, said what other university administrators have been saying away from disclo-
sing, that public universities are too broke to pay bills for essential utilities such as tele-
phone and electricity.

Prof. Gichaga said the university was operating at a Shs 1 billion deficit.

Following drastic cut on government allocations, in-
creases in student numbers and poor management, Ken-
ya's five public universities have been undergoing a fi-
nancial crisis that has to an extent affected the quality of academic programmes.

So severe are the financial problems that in one point, vice-chancellors appealed to the government to introduce an education levy targeting private firms. The move was naturally opposed.

The financial crises fac-
ing Kenya's five public universities are, however, not different from those that face universities all over Sub-Saharan Africa.

By global standards, African universities are among the worst funded. They have, however, accomplished much despite the fact that they have been around for 100 years.

Enrollments have also dropped drastically. Research findings show that.

Power to Read: President Moi awards a doctorate degree to a Kenyatta University graduate at Shs 50,000 for tuition, accommodation and subsistence, while the government gives a subsidy of Shs 70,000 to every student. Besides fees by stu-
dents, the last five years universities have started income-generating projects to make up for what the State cannot give.

Unfortunately, even for institutions that have formed full-fledged income-generating companies, not much has been achieved. One of the reasons is that universities are not client-oriented and still operate like the civil service.

Further, investment deci-
sions have been poor and even the more than Shs 1 bil-

lion credit University Improvement Project given by the World Bank has not redeemed the situation. Some of the univer-
sities used the money to buy vehicles of questionable mechanical specifications.

In the last three years, most of the universities have started continuing degree programmes in courses considered popular. Although universities said economic downturn has not been overwhelming, the success will depend on the labour market's reaction.

One problem that has con-
tinued to stall local institutions is that the content of degree courses rarely changes and most of the institutions offer courses that were being taught in the 70s even when their usefulness is in doubt.

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