

Makerere University's ambitious plan

Analysis. Appearing on a local television station days after the plan was launched, Prof Nawangwe played modest and attributed the move to the University Council and other stakeholders but insiders say while the university might be implementing an old idea, the how is Prof Nawangwe's brainchild. **Stephen Kafere** explores some of the uphill tasks awaiting Uganda's oldest university in the strides towards development.

On June 19, 2013, the then Makerere University Vice Chancellor, Prof John Dumba Ssemu, wrote to President Museveni imploring him to help the university management find an investor to utilise the institution's idle land for putting up infrastructure that would generate funds.

The letter that would only become public later pointed to an old debate about financing public higher education particularly at Makerere, Uganda's oldest and premier university. That debate is almost always more prominent when the lecturers threaten or go on strike, something that is predictably etched in the university's annual calendar.

In 2016, for example, Makerere University's shortfall in government funding was at Shs23 billion and is expected to rise.

The Dumba leadership, which at the time was trying to stop a strike by Makerere University Academic staff, proposed the construction of a teaching hospital at Katanga and a housing estate in Makindye, among others.

It was for these projects, that they sought the support and backing of Mr Museveni.

This newspaper on August 22, 2013 wrote a screaming headline "Get us land investor, Mak begs Museveni" and in subsequent reports, the media across the country would highlight the pros and cons of the move. Nothing, at least publicly, came of the proposal.

Almost five years later, the plan is back on the table in an even more refined manner. In the driving seat, is Dumba's successor and former deputy, Prof Barnabas Nawangwe.

Appearing on a local television station days after the plan was launched,

THE OVERRIDING FEARS

The overriding fear, however, is that the programme might suffer what has bedeviled many others across the country including some projects by the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) which are good on paper but never implemented or laced with irregularities. The other fear is unethical businessmen and idlers grabbing the university land and her resources in the guise of investment. Also, the issue of the need of some projects such as the teaching hospital have come to ston with those against the move saying a teaching hospital, for example, should be a major concern for Makerere now given demand in other public facilities.

The most contentious issue of land, the university says the developers will be given tenure and the land will remain property of the university.

Prof Nawangwe played modest and attributed the move to the University Council and other stakeholders but insiders say that while the university might be implementing an old idea, the how is Prof Nawangwe's brainchild.

Outside his work at Makerere University, Prof Nawangwe, has worked for Habitat Consultants and was at the time of his appointment the boss at Technology Consults, an independent engineering firm he founded based at the university.

The share turnover of the firm is said to be at Shs2 billion per year. He is also a man of many firsts, having pioneered the Architecture programme at Makerere and in Uganda with the course having international accreditation.

The plan

In the ambitious Nawangwe-plan, worth more than a trillion shillings, Makerere University through Makerere University Holding wants to partner with private companies to redevelop the institution's dilapidated infrastructure and some of its unutilised or under-utilised lands.

Mak Holding, the corporate entrepreneurial arm of Makerere University mandated to manage all her commercial interests is expected to negotiate with the potential investors. Businessman Charles Mbiire chairs MakHoldings.

The six project plan, which according to the university, is still being refined aims at improving Makerere's financial position and the nature and extent of services offered to the university's clients and personnel.

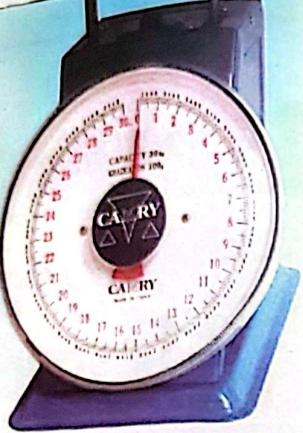
In the first project dubbed "Project 1", the university plans to get an investor to construct a convention centre, a 3-star hotel and nine student hostels with eight storeys each housing up to 3,120 rooms at the current Makerere University Guest House.

Once completed, the university says this will enable it provide hotel and conference facilities to both the general public and university staff.

The university envisages that the first project will help it generate revenue and assist the university to reduce the current annual expenditure on conferences, seminars, symposiums, external examiners, summer school students and university guests.

The second is a large scale commercial property development comprising development of a 5-star luxury hotel, a commercial centre and upmarket apartments at the university's land in the upscale neighbourhood of Kololo.

Project three envisages undertaking of a large scale commercial property development comprising a luxury hotel and upmarket apartments



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on the university's land in Makindye, Kampala.

By commercialising the land, the university aims at raising the accruing revenue.

In project four, the university hopes to directly touch the student's welfare by attracting investment to improve student accommodation and construct new facilities within the main campus.

The university has been split into four zones. The first location is the 5.68 acres adjacent to Livingstone, Africa Hall and the Rugby Grounds, the 4.98 acres adjacent to the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, the 3.98 acres adjacent to the Faculty of Technology, and the 2.29 acres adjacent to Makerere Estates Department.

The fifth project is a Student Centre at the main campus whose aim is to enhance the facilities that are presently offered to Makerere University students on campus.

Project three envisages undertaking of a large scale commercial property development comprising a luxury hotel and upmarket apartments



Chairman: Prominent businessman Charles Mbiire heads Mak Holdings, the corporate entrepreneurial arm of Makerere University mandated to manage all her commercial interests.

that will house amenities such as bookshops, a day care centre, internet kiosks, media and recreation, shopping areas, laundry services, an art auditorium, banks and other facilities.

Already, Kyambogo University has hinted on taking the same direction following an announcement by the university's Vice Chancellor, Prof Eli Katunguka.

The prevailing question, however, is whether the university will succeed where other public institutions have seemingly failed.

The project has so far received much goodwill and some people *Sunday Monitor* spoke to were unwilling to voice their concerns on the record.

The overriding fear, however, is that the programme might suffer what has bedeviled many others across the country including some projects by the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), which are good on paper, but are never implemented or are laced with irregularities.

The other fear is unethical businessmen and idlers grabbing the university land and her resources in the guise of investment.

Big goals, bigger challenges



Plan. The vice chancellor of Makerere University, Prof Barnabas Nawangwe, speaks to the press during the MAK property investors conference in Kampala recently. PHOTO BY AUBREY LUSOMA

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Also, the issue of the need of some projects such as the teaching hospital have come to question with those against the move saying building a teaching hospital, for example, should not be a major concern for Makerere now given the demand in other public facilities.

On the most contentious issue of land, the University says the developers will be given lease tenure and the land will remain property of the university.

At the end of the agreed period, the investment will either revert to the university or the leadership at the time will exercise their discretion to extend the lease of the developer subject to their interest in the partnership.

Also, tasked with fleshing out the proposals say they are tasked to change in the course of developing the partnerships.

Last year, Buganda Kingdom unveiled an ambitious programme such as that of Makerere to develop Mengo Palace's 216-acre piece of land located just 3km outside Kampala's central business district.

Buganda Kingdom, working with developers, plans to set up four projects at the palace land including a new 'twokobe' (main house) on 70 acres, an education complex (50 acres), a teaching hospital (60 acres) and exhibition grounds (36 acres).

The move has been subject to debate and much is yet to come of it since, Makerere partnering with the private sector to do business. Finance Ministry spokesperson Jim Mugunga says there are many examples for Makerere University

WORLD BANK

The World Bank says Public-private partnerships possess the potential to help Uganda raise the money it needs to fund investment in its infrastructure.

The bank, however, warns this can only be achieved "if the government is committed to building the appropriate set of frameworks to create a conducive environment for private investments and to adopting robust project identification, screening, procurement and contract management processes".

Mr Gideon Badagawa, the executive director of the Private Sector Foundation (PSFU), shares the view of the World Bank on public facilities such as Makerere partnering with the private sector to do business.

"In my opinion, this should be the way to go. Across the board, government needs to work with the private sector."

Public Private Partnerships need to take shape. We have the law and what we need are the guidelines," he says. He says universities and other such entities should concentrate on their core competencies and hire the private sector to develop other infrastructure but for this to succeed, he says, government needs to do more.

"The principle infrastructure should be designed and managed by the private sector. What we are asking for is a framework and implementation. It is one thing to have a policy and the law but it is another to have the framework and guidelines. These are the things government needs to help us with," he adds.

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Makerere will also need to broaden its scope. Prof Semakula Kiwanuka has previously opined that the university can raise revenue by creating commercial ventures and strategic investment.

In an opinion published by the *New Vision* early this year, he proposed that the university engages in low and middle income housing projects and commercial farming.

The other areas, he suggested, were creating endowment funds where donors and friends of the university can donate, establishment of science, technology and innovation parks.

All, he recommends, should be managed by qualified investments and financial professional experts to generate the much needed revenue.

Mr Augustus Nwagaba, the professor of Economics at Makerere University and an international consultant on economic transformation says he is happy that his previous endeavours with colleagues might come to fruition.

Prof Nwagaba deputed Prof Dumba on a project about 10 years ago to look into how the University could generate resources.

"It is a wonderful arrangement and it is a high time that the university took practical steps to implement it. I produced a paper on the same but it has taken time because the university council was slow," he says.

For the programme to bear any fruits, he says, Prof Nawangwe needs to employ the skills and experience from his private endeavours to see to it that the project succeeds.

He says Makerere University can draw examples from British universities such as the London School of Economics and University of Birmingham that have partnered with the private sector to deliver world class facilities and services to their clients.

Also, he says, the programme implementation needs to have a degree of independence to succeed.

"The holding company should be independent of the university and national politics. It should have separate accounts and run its own board and only report independently to the council," he says.