

Universities should be the drivers of Big Four agenda



The government has allocated Sh400 billion to Jubilee's four pillars: manufacturing, universal healthcare, affordable housing and food security.

By Mohamed Abdullahi Adan
hashtag@standardmedia.co.ke

If you have been in Kenya — or reading about Kenya — for the last several months you have most probably heard about the 'Big Four' agenda.

The government has allocated Sh44.6 billion for universal health coverage while Sh6.5 billion will go towards the provision of affordable and decent housing for all Kenyans.

The Treasury has allocated Sh20.25 billion to enhance food and nutrition security to all Kenyans by 2022, and Sh12.4 billion to support value addition and raise the manufacturing sector's share to gross domestic product to 15 per cent by 2022.

The target numbers are impressive. Government, for instance, looking at to have at least five million square feet of industrial sheds established to improve cotton production, and raising the share of the manufacturing sector from nine per cent to 15 per cent of the GDP by 2022.

However, the reality is that under each area there are other secondary benefits. For example, while targeting to build the 500,000 housing units, 350,000 people will get jobs. In improving the cotton industry, 500,000 jobs will be created directly, and at least another 100,000 in clothing manufacturing. Under agro-processing 1,000 SMEs will be established and at least 200,000 jobs created.

Progressive policies the higher education fra-

ternity has undergone tremendous transformation in the recent past. Key among them is the enactment of Universities Act No. 42 of 2012 which commenced on December 12, 2012. This brought the establishment, governance and administration of universities under same legal framework.

This repealed Acts of Parliament for seven universities which operated under individual Acts. The new law also caused some public university constituent colleges operating under Legal Orders to be upgraded to full-fledged public universities.

Prior to December 13 2012, public universities were established through individual Acts of Parliament. Following enactment of universities Act No 42 of 2012, the public universities have since been established through the award of charter.

All individual Acts were repealed and the previous public universities re-accredited through charter award after institutional quality audits.

We, therefore, have 71 universities and colleges including those with interim letters.

The universities' mandates are teaching and learning, research

and community outreach. However, they seemingly put so much energy on the teaching and learning, putting the other mandates at the periphery.

It is time that we outgrow this traditional way of doing things by equally putting emphasis on the other two mandates and even go beyond and adopt an entrepreneurial culture to raise monies for research and innovations to drive our country forward and help in the achievement of the big four.

Adopt self-reliance

universities in the developed world have outgrown the over reliance on the government funding and generate funds through innovative research and adopting entrepreneurial culture.

This has put universities in three different cadres: traditional teaching and learning universities, research and innovation universities and, finally, entrepreneurial universities.

Our universities, therefore, need to move out of their comfort zones, draw achievable and realistic strategic plans on how to generate funds through drawing of fundable proposals to our government and international agencies to help in generating home grown solutions to our problems and support the Government in achievement of the Big Four agenda.

The government needs to support this move by putting necessary policies in place to encour-

age our universities to take up this challenge. This can be achieved by grouping them into the Big Four areas. Those leaning towards agriculture can work together and be funded by the government to change our aridlands to food producing zones through irrigation.

Those that lean towards engineering can be put together and help in innovative ways on production of cheap but durable materials for housing and come up with alternative ways of reducing traffic on our roads.

Those universities that are biased towards business can work together and come up with how to change the mind set of our youth and mothers, train them on entrepreneurial skills and link them to institutions that provide funding.

They can also help venture into possibilities of 24hour economy.

Those that have a medical inclination can also be put together to improve on our health systems, do more research on our traditional herbal medicine and link them to modern, retrain health personnel, expand health facilities.

They can come up with innovative ways of reaching those in the rural set that may need drugs or any other help required to save lives without being obstructed by our perennial traffic jam or our bad roads.

This therefore, calls for a concerted effort among our education stake holders, change of mind set in our universities by shifting towards creating wealth, doing more home-grown research and coming up with very innovative ways of driving our country forward.

Enhancing the direct link between the industry and the institutions of higher learning needs to be looked into and the government needs to engage more the universities through its CEOs in driving and achieving its strategic goals within the required timeframe.

The writer is the Dean of students Karatina University and the Chairman Kenya Universities Deans of Students Association



Kenya Universities Deans of Students Association Chairman Mohamed Abdullahi Adan [Jenipher Wachu, Standard]



Digitisation pays off for publishers, libraries

E-books, e-readers and other book-related technologies have done more good than harm to the local publishing sector. This is according to Lawrence Njagi, the Chair of Kenya Publishers Association and CEO of Mountain Top Publishers who was speaking during the launch of a report from a joint program by the Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) and Worldreader, titled LEAP 2.0 Final Report at the beginning of this month.

The LEAP (Libraries, E-reading, Activities and Partnerships) project brought Worldreader's digital international reading platform to 61 public libraries countrywide.

Responding to a question on the impact of 'going digital' on the local publishing space, Mr Njagi said: "In the beginning, we were skeptical. Publishers are very traditional in approach. Our key worry, even today, is security of the content. But, again, you can't live your life in fear. We took a calculated risk and carefully chose which platforms to have our books hosted. On the Worldreader platform, "I have not heard a single complaint so far on security. So, yes, there's that risk which we can't control but I think we have made much more gain than the feared. When I got my statement for the last quarter, I was very curious where my books were selling. My books were selling in Ghana and the US, so I think in terms of growth in the publishing industry, we have grown to a much bigger market."

While Worldreader itself is a not-for-profit organisation, its platform can be used as a gateway to Amazon.com by publishers. David Risher, the CEO and co-founder of Worldreader, is himself a former Amazon Senior Vice President.

Kaluma Sama, the Head Librarian at KNLS' Buruburn branch said libraries are not just for reading any more but are now also places to interact and create. There has been a paradigm shift in what libraries are all about.

"Librarians no longer only man desks but now also go out with the e-readers and reach as many schools and settlements as possible. The introduction of the e-readers has had positive influence inside the library as well as outside. We have been able to reach children in areas that normally cannot be reached," she said. [Alex Nderitu]