

**Providing opportunities to African youths and other disadvantaged groups:  
The Uganda Martyrs University approach/ strategy**

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**Abstract**

Youth is a period of building “self concept” often influenced by parents, peers, gender and culture. The United Nations (UN) youth agenda is guided by the World Programme of Action for Youths (WPAY) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1995. WPAY has 15 priority areas. Africa is often regarded as the “youngest continent” because of the large number of young persons, and in Uganda, 49% of the population is under 15 years.

Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) is a faith-based, private, not-for-profit institution founded in 1993 to address the perceived moral decay in business and professions. At UMU, ethics is a compulsory subject irrespective of one’s field of study. UMU obtained its civil charter in April 2005 and is one of only six out of 29 private universities in Uganda with this status. UMU places research and scholarship on top of its role agenda, followed by community engagement and finally teaching.

UMU is located in a rural setting, and believes a university must not exist in isolation and that a university must be owned by the community where it is located. UMU’s focus areas include, *inter-alia*, HIV/AIDS, poverty alleviation, peace and justice and food security. UMU’s outreach project at Nnindy is to help the community lift itself out of poverty and all faculties are strongly encouraged to mainstream outreach in their curricula. UMU’s wireless network has been extended to neighbouring communities as far as Buwama, 15 km away. Criteria for new campuses include uniqueness of purpose. In this regard, UMU’s Mbale campus focuses in education; Ngetta Campus is intended to be the “hard work” campus, while Kabale is to be developed as a polytechnic. Most of these are targeting the youths.

Key words: Africa, community engagement, ethics, Uganda Martyrs University, youth employment

## **Résumé**

La jeunesse est une période de construction de «concept de soi», souvent influencée par les parents, les pairs, le sexe et la culture. L'agenda de l'Organisation des Nations Unies (ONU) pour la jeunesse est guidé par le Programme Mondial d'Action pour les Jeunes (PMAJ) adopté par l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies en 1995. Le PMAJ a 15 zones prioritaires. L'Afrique est souvent considérée comme le «continent le plus jeune» en raison du grand nombre des jeunes et en Ouganda, 49% de la population ont moins de 15 ans.

L'Université de Martyrs de l'Ouganda (UMU) est une institution confessionnelle, privée et sans but lucratif, fondée en 1993 pour répondre à la décadence morale perçue dans les entreprises et les professions. A UMU, l'éthique est un sujet obligatoire, indépendamment du domaine d'étude des individus. UMU a obtenu sa charte civile en Avril 2005 et est l'une des seulement six parmi 29 universités privées en Ouganda qui ont ce statut. UMU place la recherche et l'érudition au premier plan de son ordre du jour, suivies par l'engagement communautaire et enfin l'enseignement.

UMU est située dans un cadre rural, et estime qu'une université ne doit pas exister dans l'isolement et que l'université doit être la propriété de la communauté où elle se trouve. Les domaines d'intervention de UMU comprennent, entre autres, le VIH / SIDA, la lutte contre la pauvreté, la paix, la justice et la sécurité alimentaire. Le projet de sensibilisation d'UMU à Nnindyé est d'aider la communauté de se sortir elle-même de la pauvreté et toutes les facultés sont fortement encouragées à intégrer les attentes du courant dominant d'éducation dans leurs programmes. Le réseau sans fil de UMU a été étendu aux communautés voisines jusqu'à Buwama, à 15 km. Les critères pour les nouveaux campus comprennent l'unicité de but. À cet égard, le campus de Mbale de UMU se concentre sur l'enseignement, celui de Ngetta est destiné à être le campus du «travail dur», tandis que celui de Kabale doit être conçu comme une école polytechnique. La plupart d'entre eux ciblent les jeunes.

Mots clés: Afrique, engagement communautaire, éthique, Université de Martyrs de l'Ouganda, emploi des jeunes

## **Background**

The theme for this session is “Engaging African Youths in Rural Transformation”. I have chosen three words from the theme for in depth analysis and evaluation. The three words are

“Youth”, “Rural” and “Transformation”. According to Macmillan’s dictionary, youth is that time of life between childhood and adulthood, at times referred to as “maturity”. It should be emphasised that maturity may not correspond to the individual’s chronological age as there are times when we see semblance of immaturity in individuals of all age groups. The term youth is often used interchangeably with adolescent, teenager or a young person. Youth reflects a mind set of attitudes and attributes. Youth is often associated with vigour, freshness and possible immaturity. Youth is a stage of building “self concept” and this is influenced by peers, gender, and culture (Thomas, 2003). Youth is a time of emerging responsibility and accountability. Family and government have roles in supporting young person’s to enable them express their youthful sense of creativity and self esteem. August 12<sup>th</sup> is acknowledged and celebrated as International Youth Day.

The United Nations youth agenda is guided by the World Programme of Action for Youths (WPAY) adopted by the United General Assembly in 1995. WPAY provides a policy frame work and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the status of youths around the world. WPAY embraces 15 priority areas viz. education, employment, environment, armed conflict, hunger, poverty, health, HIV/AIDS globalisation, information and communication technology, juvenile justice, leisure time activities, substance abuse, intergenerational issues and disability.

Although it is generally accepted that humanity originated in the African continent, Africa is often referred to as the world’s “youngest continent” because the population of youths in Africa is higher than in any other continent, In 2012, 70% of Africa’s population was under 30 years. In 2007, about 3.2 million young persons in sub-Saharan Africa were living with HIV. Taking the age group of 15-24 years one can say that nearly 20% of Africa’s population can be regarded as youths broken down as follows: 18.6% in Central Africa, 18.5% in Eastern Africa, 18.8% in West Africa, 15.6% in Southern Africa and 13.9% in North Africa. About 36.8% of Africa’s work force is youths. Challenges facing Africa’s youths include education, employment, health and lack of participation in decision making process.

Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, second only to Niger with 49% of the population being under 15 years

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of age. In addition, it is one of the most rapidly growing populations. In 1969 Uganda's population was 9.5 million, in 1991 it was 16.7 million and in 2011 it was 32.4 million (almost doubling every 10 years). Besides, Uganda has a very high dependency ratio as nearly all of those under 15 years are unemployed. Uganda's labour force is driven by a high fertility ratio of 7 children per every woman of child bearing age, compared to 3.25 children in Gabon or compared to one child per family in China (enforced). It should be noted that 2 children/woman is a replacement figure.

In Australia by comparison, 20% of the population is considered youths. Besides there is a Minister for youths whose vision is for young Australians to be active and productive members of the community. The Australian Government has set aside Au\$64billion as a 4 years investment (AU \$16 billion/year) for schooling, physical and mental health as well as tertiary, vocational education and community services. While Uganda must be hailed for establishing universal primary and now universal secondary education, there is no tangible infrastructure investment to support this initiative and no plans to absorb those completing secondary schools for continued tertiary and professional development.

Finally, we must recognise that youths of to-day are tomorrow's leaders, and if we are to "build for the future" borrowing from Makerere's motto, we must pay attention to to-days youths. The election of the 19 year old member of parliament for Usuk in Uganda is a case in point! This should open our eyes.

Rural refers to the country side, away from urbanised areas. Rural relates to the sparsely populated areas usually devoted to agriculture and farmland. In rural areas there is usually less air and water pollution than in urban areas. In Africa and in Uganda in particular there is considerable migration from rural to urban areas in search for salaried jobs. Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) is located in a rural environment, and therefore we are fortunate in being able to do many things that our competitors in urban areas cannot do.

Transformation refers to marked change in appearance, scenery, accommodation, adaptation and adjustment. It is to do with both qualitative and quantitative change. Transformation leaders are those who spearhead changes that elevate profitability and change roles. Leaders who undertake a voyage of personal

understanding and development can transform not only their own capabilities, but also their institutions (Goleman *et al.*, 2002). In this regard reference must be made to the transformation leadership theory propagated by Burns in his book on Leadership (Burns, 1978). Burns makes two assumptions on transformational leadership viz.

- 1) In transformational leadership there is an association with high moral position which motivates and results in people following a leader who promotes this;
- 2) Working collaboratively is better than working individually.

Burns defines transformational leadership as a process where leaders and followers engage in a mutual process of raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. Transformational leadership raises the bar by appealing to high ideals and values. According to Burns transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership where the appeal is to more selfish concerns. An appeal to social values encourages people to collaborate rather than work as individuals. Transformational leadership is an on-going process.

### **Uganda Martyrs University**

Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) is a faith-based, private, not for profit institution owned by the Uganda Episcopal Conference of Catholic Bishops. It opened its doors in 1993 with 84 students. UMU was founded because of the need to address the perceived moral decay in business and professions, and hence the first two programmes viz. Faculty of Business Administration and Management and the Institute of Ethics and Development Studies. UMU now has about 5000 students in eight faculties and two schools. The 8 faculties are Agriculture, Built Environment, Business Administration and Management, Education, Health Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and the Institute of Ethics and Development Studies. The two schools are the East African School of Diplomacy, Governance and International Studies and the Post Graduate Medical School. UMU received its civil charter in April 2005 and is one of only six out of 29 private universities that have attained this status. The remainder, 23 operate on what is referred to as “provisional licences”.

### **The Role of a University**

The role of a university was first spelt out by Cardinal Newman in his book the “Idea of a University” published in 1852. It placed teaching as the primary role of a university. This came from the British model. Research was subsequently added,

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borrowing from the German model. After the World War, community service was added.

Uganda Martyrs University has re-aligned its roles as a university. UMU places Research and Scholarship on top of its agenda. This is followed by community engagement and lastly teaching. UMU believes anybody can teach, and you do not need to be at a university in order to teach. ***However, research and scholarship are the primary roles of a university.***

UMU's promotion policy/criteria embrace all three roles outlined above viz. (a) Research and scholarship as judged by the number of publications in referred journals and the impact factor of the journal in question and the amount of grant proposals written and research grants received, (b) Outreach/Community engagement as judged by the number of committees and extent of involvement by an individual at the university, in the surrounding community, at the National, Regional and International arena; and (c) Teaching as judged by student appraisal and peer assessment. We clearly accept that it is rare to find an individual who excels in all three areas, and therefore we refer to some as "research intensive" others as "community engagement intensive" and others as "teaching intensive". All the three roles are catered for in calculating the work load for academics.

## **Uganda Martyrs University Expansion Policy**

UMU is owned by the Uganda Episcopal Conference of Catholic Bishops. Uganda is divided into four Ecclesiastical Provinces viz. Kampala, Tororo, Gulu and Mbarara. UMU's expansion policy underscores the need to have UMU's impact felt in all the four Ecclesiastical Provinces of Uganda. Hitherto, most of UMU's activities were in the Ecclesiastical Province of Kampala. On the 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2010 UMU opened its second campus in Mbale in the Ecclesiastical Province of Tororo. Plans are at an advanced stage to open Ngetta Campus in the Ecclesiastical Province of Gulu and in Kabale in the Ecclesiastical Province of Mbarara.

UMU has criteria approved by its Governing Council for the establishment of campuses. These are:-

- 1) That each campus must be "owned" by the local bishop as well as the local population where the campus is located;
- 2) That each campus must be financially self sustaining;

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Strategy**

- 3) That each campus must be unique in character and not merely a replica of the main campus in Nkozi;
- 4) That each campus must have its own advisory board.

How is UMU transforming rural youths? Stated differently, what opportunities is UMU providing to rural youths? In other words, what is UMU's strategy in addressing the theme of this workshop? UMU subscribes to the statement by Brother Martin former Rector of Assumption University in Bangkok, Thailand that, "*Education is the most effective way to liberate humanity from ignorance and poverty*".

First, UMU's main campus is located in a rural setting some 90 kilometres away from the capital city of Kampala. The expansion policy that encourages activities in all corners of Uganda is indeed appropriate.

Second, at UMU, ethics is a compulsory subject irrespective of the field of study. Every student has courses in ethics that are relevant to his/her field of study.

Third, UMU believes that a university must not exist in isolation; that a university must not be regarded as an ivory tower and that a university must be owned by the community where it is located. In this regard, UMU has an active Community Relations Committee established in 2007, one month after the current Vice Chancellor took office. Membership consists of representatives from the university and the surrounding community. The committee meets regularly and advises Management as to the needs and concerns of the neighbouring community. The Committee has an education sub-committee which recommends to the University Scholarships Committee who in the community should benefit from scholarship(s) set aside for the community. UMU has five focus areas viz. (a) Service to the Church with the view to producing men and women, lay and religious persons who will be leaders of tomorrow, (b) HIV/AIDS and UMU has a policy on HIV/AIDS and sexual harassment shared by a wide community; (c) Poverty alleviation and in this regard UMU has selected a nearby parish Nnindyie and aims to assist the community lift itself out of poverty. This is being done jointly with the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, USA. UMU has a Directorate of Out-reach whose head is a member of Senate. UMU encourages all faculties to main stream outreach in their

curricula. (d) Peace and justice, and (e) Management of local food resources (food security).

Fourth, UMU with the support from NUFFIC has set up a wireless network on campus. This facility has now been extended to the neighbouring community, i.e., at Nkozi Trading Centre, at Kayabwe, Buwama and Kankooobe orphanage. Failure to adequately sensitise the community was/is a major weakness and the facility at Nkozi Trading Centre was recently vandalised and because of the under utilisation of the facility at Kayabwe; we plan to shift the hot spot to Nnindye.

Fifth, based on our criteria for expansion and the setting up of unique campuses and courses our strategy is as follows:-

- 1) Campus at Mbale will specialise in education. Consideration is being made to shift our faculty of the Education to Nyondo;
- 2) Ngetta will introduce a new approach to tertiary education, and Ngetta will be labelled our “hard work campus”. At Ngetta, in addition to academic pursuits, every student will in rotation be engaged in physical work, i.e., cleaning the compound, manning security, driving university vehicles, repairing old buildings and helping to construct new ones, working on the university farm and working in the kitchen and in the dining hall. The aim is to help build character and make students appreciate the value of work well done. In addition, we believe this will help with the rehabilitation process of the North that has experienced civil war leading to displacements for over twenty five years. We believe as well that this approach will enable our graduates develop hands-on skills to enable them become job creators rather than job seekers. Our main challenge is the need for an endowment fund as we would wish, funds permitting, that our students will not have to pay tuition as they will have contributed in kind.
- 3) For our Kabale campus we hope to introduce a polytechnic approach starting with motor vehicle mechanical engineering, hospital equipment repair engineering, agricultural engineering and petroleum engineering. This approach will enable youths to benefit and find jobs in factories, motor garages and health care facilities;
- 4) It should be mentioned that UMU has other unique courses, i.e., organic agriculture and agro-ecology and both these target mostly rural communities;

- 5) Generally, there are two types of migration viz. those migrating from rural to urban centres is search for better economic opportunities and from war torn to peaceful areas. UMU has its curricula for the Advanced Diploma and Masters degree in Refugee and Migration Studies prepared and approved/accredited by the National Council for Higher Education for 5 years. Both these are to be launched in January, 2013. Hopefully we shall train persons capable of spearheading our national policies in this area and dealing with migration and refugee issues as and when they arise. UMU's long-term plan is to establish an International Centre for Peace and Justice which would serve three main objectives (a) to develop local curricula (from primary through secondary to tertiary level) for peace and conflict studies, (b) to establish resource centres for peace and conflict studies, and (c) to establish a scholar in residence programme whereby we hope to attract eminent scholars e.g. Nobel Peace Laureates to the centre and while they are doing their own reflections they will interact with our students who for this programme will not be only our full time students but also will include "law makers" - parliamentarians, law enforcement officers, i.e., police, prison and military officers as well as implementers, i.e., civil servants. In the interactions, hopefully the way forwards to lasting peace in the region will be charted.
- 6) Lastly, UMU is working with Leuphania University and UNESCO to run activities on Student Training in Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP). The first set of students were trained and facilitated with a small capital grant. We hope to make this a permanent feature of our training and again this is targeting the youths. We have heard about Earth University in Costa Rica and we would like to seek opportunity to interact with them more in this initiative. In addition, our micro-finance programmes will train persons to assist with the Wekembe Micro-finance activities and again this targets the youths mostly.

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