

University Report

BBC

AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

MS 4571/29

UNIVERSITY REPORT

No. 149

Broadcast on 23rd, 25th and 27th May, 1971

COSMO PIETERSE:

This week we hear from the holder of a new post at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, and, also from the first Vice-Chancellor of the six-year old University of Malawi.

So first to Makerere where the University fairly recently appointed a Public Relations Officer. The first incumbent of this new office is Mr. David Musoke, himself a graduate of the University. When Elizabeth Keeble spoke to Mr. Musoke for us, she asked him first -

ELIZABETH KEEBLE:

Isn't it rather unusual for a University to have a P.R.O.?

MR. D. MUSOKE:

I am sure it is not rather unusual. As a matter of fact it has become a fashion these days for organizations besides Industries to have a P.R.O. For example, in East Africa, Dar-es-Salaam University has got a P.R.O. Many organizations, for example, here in Kampala are now picking up the idea, I don't know whether they're doing it for window-dressing, but it gives a good image for such an establishment to have a P.R.O.; somebody to be handy in case something happens, someone to give a good image of such an Institution.

COSMO PIETERSE:

Mr. David Musoke, recently appointed Public Relations Officer of Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, talking to Elizabeth Keeble on the office he holds, and its meaning in general practice. But to come to Mr. Musoke's own position. Mr. Musoke sees the work of the University Public Relations Officer to include linking the students' world with the world at large. This means he must explain the University to the country's citizens and also show how relevant the University is to the life of the people in general. His office, will, therefore, amongst other things, organize public lectures and publicise University activities through press, radio and television. There is a wide area of liaison work, of compiling information, and of spreading information, that his department will cover. To mention specific cases that have already arisen:

MR. D. MUSOKE:

For example, recently Professor Ali Mazrui of Political Science went to Britain for a lecture tour immediately after a coup, a military coup in Uganda. Now people had the wrong end of this, and they entertained suspicions about his visit promptly after the coup. Now in order to clear the air and put everything in the right perspective, I went and interviewed Professor Mazrui about his visit and this interview was carried in the press. So that the wrong impression which might have been created by his immediate departure for London was corrected. Now I will be doing the same with other departments, and heads of departments, and I'll be issuing statements to the press, the radio and the television, to explain why people are moving where, and why certain things are being done.

ELIZABETH KEEBLE:

You were, I believe, appointed to this position before the military coup in Uganda in January, but I expect since then you've had quite a lot of work to do to correct wrong impressions?

MR. D. MUSOKE:

Certainly I've had to correct some wrong impressions which were entertained. For example, in the "Nationalist" a paper published in Tanzania, in actual fact it is the ruling parties newspaper. Now in their articles, they said Makerere was under the threat of the Uganda army men, that they were threatening us. This was entirely untrue, and the University is as normal as it has ever been, and the fact that there has been a coup has not affected the University at all.

ELIZABETH KEEBLE:

Did you actually write a letter to the "Nationalist" to correct this?

MR. D. MUSOKE:

Yes, I had to write a reply to this article which I thought was hostile to the University and was telling no truth at all.

COSMO PIETERSE:

Mr. David Musoke, Public Relations Officer of Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, talking to Elizabeth Keeble about some aspects of his work. And now from Makerere to Malawi, to hear from Dr. Ian Michael the first Vice-Chancellor of Malawi's first University. The University itself is now six years old, and consists of five colleges which lie about 200 miles apart. Well this, naturally, creates problems. More problems were at one stage created by the structure of the University of Malawi. It caters for students for degrees, and for

COSMO PIETERSE:

students for diplomas; it hopes to supply chiefly the so-called middle-level technical staff that developing industry in Malawi requires. About two-thirds of its student population study for certificates and diplomas. Dr. Michael refers to the diploma-holders as diplomists. Now seeing that at the University of Malawi there are so many more potential diplomats, or diplomists, than graduates, can it be regarded as a real University -
Dr. Michael:

DR. I. MICHAEL:

It's a question of levels and standards. I would be horrified if our standards were any lower than those of an orthodox University. It is the standards that matter, the standards by which you judge the intellectual quality of the work, the standards of thoroughness, integrity, of search for knowledge. All the basic academic and intellectual standards are important but they are not, and they never have been, the exclusive property of those studying for degrees, or researching. Ideally they operate in a primary school, there are relatively appropriate, intellectual and scholarly standards at all levels of education. What we have done is to shift the explicit, and conventional application of these standards a notch down the scale of levels, and the level of our diploma work is slightly below that of an ordinary degree in a British University. But there is another point which should also be remembered and that is, we are talking about levels of work, but not quality of students.

Part of our realism over the man-power situation has been to restrict the entry to degree courses to a hundred students a year, and with each year the number of school-leavers with acceptable educational qualifications is increasing, the standard of entry to the

DR. I. MICHAEL:

degree courses rises, and it is now true, I think, to say that between a half and two-thirds of those of our students who are on diploma courses, would be entirely acceptable for degree work. The quality of the students is quite orthodox for most Universities.

DOUGLAS LAMB:

Has the inclusion of both degrees and diploma work within the one institution, and the academic structure which has resulted from it led to any special difficulties?

DR. I MICHAEL:

I don't think it's led to difficulties, but, of course, it started with difficulties which we haven't by any means resolved. We've referred to a natural suspicion on the part of the outside world as to whether we were real, that doesn't worry me very much. We get our students accepted, we get diploma students accepted for further work in degrees and get degree students accepted for higher degrees.

The subtler difficulty was, and remains, the natural conservatism of most students, a feeling that a degree is better than a diploma and, therefore, students on degree courses are better than students on diploma courses and, therefore, that a college which works more at degree level than at diploma level is ^abetter college than the other. These in-built potential snobberies affect our students and our staff, they are much less bothersome than they used to be, but they persist.

COSMO PIETERSE:

Dr. Ian Michael, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malawi, talking to Douglas Lamb about the standards, the structure, and some of the difficulties of the six-year old University.

COSMO PIETERSE:
CONT'D:

We shall return to the question of standards later in this report. But meanwhile, the University is committed to being useful to the community that supports it. Has this happened? Does the University link with agriculture, industry, government? And to what extent?

DR. I. MICHAEL:

There are contacts, such contacts are never sufficient. We've tried to make them strong from the start, partly through the obvious personal involvement of senior University people with senior civil servants, more formally through Consultative Committees set up by the University but bringing in the representatives of Government and private industry. These Consultative Committees have proved extremely useful, particularly in the field of agriculture, and in the wider field of natural resources in respect of our business courses and engineering. The contacts are quite good, but as always, they need to be strengthened.

The extent to which our students are being used I suppose is crudely measured by the readiness of which they get jobs and, so far, there has been no difficulty at all in this, except momentarily perhaps, a slight prejudice on the part of some employers against students who emerge with a degree in Social Science, so called. We include History, which is a very safe subject in most people's view amongst the Social Sciences, so we hope that this may steady the nerve of employers, who are faced with a graduate with a Bachelor of Social Science. But both the diplomists and the graduates have so far been able to get jobs without difficulty.

DOUGLAS LAMB:

To turn to another area of relationship Dr. Michael, the University of Malawi has largely a foreign staff.

DOUGLAS LAMB:
CONT'D.

In this situation is it possible for the work and the teaching and research of the University to be sufficiently related to the national culture?

DR. I. MICHAEL:

This is a question which has bothered us from the start. We began by asking rather naively perhaps, what the University would be, which tried to respond directly and appropriately to the specific African and specifically Malawian environment in which we, as foreigners were being asked to work. The question itself was viewed with some suspicion, there was a little bit of a feeling that we were implying that what was best in our own countries was too good for Malawi. This of course was not the case, we were aware of the criticisms that had been made of earlier Universities in Africa, that in their curriculum and their organization that they had imposed a Western culture from Western feelings on their host countries. But, in essence, we were asked to bring in the best that we knew, and we have tried to express relevance, not so much through the design and organization of the University, because here there were no models, but in the curriculum and in the interpretation of conventional subjects in the application of them to the culture and traditions of this country.

We ought to be doing a great deal more than in terms of African Studies, to give it a very wide blanket term, than we do. Our involvement is partial through individual research workers in Sociology, particular items like traditional dances, and bits and pieces here and there which are important individually, but don't add up to an integrated programme, making the sort of impact that we would like to happen. This I'm afraid to say is just a question of money.

COSMO PIETERSE: Money, then, is a problem. Then what about standards. How does Dr. Michael see the present situation at the University of Malawi.

DR. I. MICHAEL: We have good students, we have a good staff. The teaching is pretty good, there is research being done. The whole area beyond that will, of course, develop over the years. By this, I mean the relationship between the internally organised University, and society. This is where the foreigner has his limitations.

I see that it's been my job to get the University started in such a form that will not make it too difficult for my successors, to fit it in far more successfully to the overall society of the country than we can do. This raises, of course, these huge questions about the elitism and the position of the graduates and diplomists in society. We are afraid of elitism. We don't like our students, and the society does not like our students to think that they are special or privileged people, and they don't. They necessarily seem to behave in that way, as all intellectuals seem occasionally to behave. We are trying, in all sorts of ways, to adjust and keep the relationship of our students to their homes, to the countryside - but this is a job for my successors to polish and refine. Until it's done there can be no complacency.

COSMO PIETERSE: Dr. Ian Michael, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malawi from its inception and over the last six years, talking to Douglas Lamb.
And with those uncomplacent thoughts from Malawi we come to the end of another "University Report", so until next week, from me, Cosmo Pieterse, it's goodbye for now.