



KeSEBAE NEWS



Newsletter of the Kenya Society of Environmental, Biological and Agricultural Engineers

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Could our Universities Still Count as the Conscience of the Nation?

By Patrick Ajwang'



The COVID-19 pandemic that happened over two years ago was a very telling moment for me as an advanced degree holder. For the first time some of my village mates asked me to assist them. They were facing imminent death and they wanted a 'doctor' to find a cure of the disease. So, they asked me whether I could apply my doctorate credentials to find a cure for the COVID-19 disease. I explained to them that my doctorate degree was in Agricultural Engineering and that means I am not a health scientist as they had believed. But I was very happy that for the first time, people whom I care so much about despite their callous attitude to higher degrees had enquired about my academic background. And even though I have tried to get into vantage positions where I could more effectively use my skills and demonstrate their relevance in solving their endemic problem of food insecurity, the wielders of decision-making power have been very uncomfortable with the prospect of direct engagement with the citizenry by a scholar.

DEAR READER

Welcome to KeSEBAE Newsletter.

A fortnightly Newsletter touching on topical issues affecting our environment.

KeSEBAE NEWS is a Newsletter of the Kenya Society of Environmental, Biological and Agricultural Engineers (KeSEBAE)

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But the incident I have mentioned above confirms the general lack of interest in what scholars do and the relevance of academic work to solving everyday problems in society. Many people in developing countries still believe that academic work done in universities is rather abstract and theoretical and has nothing to do with everyday problems. It is common to hear some car owners speak highly of the mechanics who can disassemble and assemble their cars, and berate engineering scholars who “cannot even change punctured tyres on their vehicles”. They hardly care about the fact that the scholars have moved on to higher thinking responsibilities that require more intellectual engagement rather than the physical work of a craftsman. In other words, the higher-level skills that have created the product that is being repaired and maintained is conveniently ignored and underrated.

Yet in many developed countries, universities are like the pivot of communal life and industrial development. Many of the products and services that are consumed in those countries can be directly traced to the work of their scholars and scientists who collaborate seamlessly with their industries. In fact, inventions and innovations largely start in the universities then get incubated as start-ups and eventually get scaled up in small companies that turn out to be conglomerates over time.

Thus, universities are not only the citadel of sapiential authority but also the laboratories for entrepreneurial adventures. In those countries, universities have the traditional right to be heard because of their superior knowledge and experience. Indeed, they are regarded to a large extent as the conscience of the nations with the ultimate repository of human knowledge acquired of the years through accepted scientific research methods.

In fact, even the Church which ideally should be the ultimate moral conscience of a nation, has often resorted to universities to prove certain

theological dogmas. For instance, the Sacrament of Penance of the Catholic Church has received backing from numerous professional psychologists who aver that sharing about a psychological or mental problem is the first step towards resolving the problem.

But the most fundamental value of traditional university life that has entrenched its position as the conscience of nations is the pursuit of the absolute freedom in trying to attain the truth. Academic freedom is the principle that scholars should be free to pursue their intellectual exploits without any limitations, save for serious ethical issues that are largely defined by the Church. It has been shown that the pursuit of the absolute truth with absolute freedom can have both negative and positive consequences. Scientists often talk about the limits of science i.e. there are issues that science cannot fully explain.

For instance, the ongoing debate on climate change and global warming has shown that science cannot conclusively predict the weather or climate. Whereas there is a “very strong suspicion” that the earth is warming up, honest scientists will still tell you that the debate is not conclusive. A prediction of El-Nino rainfall has sometimes turned to be a disappointment for weather forecasters. In the university system, there are people with divergent views on such issues. Good universities allow critiquing of the work of even senior-most professors, which indeed buttresses their stature as citadels of conscience. Criticism can be founded on scientific experimentation or religious/ethical beliefs. But it has contributed immensely to new and better concepts, product development and societal change.

Traditional universities tended to be conservative in their moral and economic outlook. They extolled gradualism rather than hedonism thus mirroring the reality that a human being has about 60 years of productive life that should be pursued judiciously but patiently. They were not

profit-oriented but more of social institutions. They also rewarded meritocracy rather than nepotism laced with mediocrity. Such attitudes made university life resonate with the hopes of the average farmer, blacksmith or carpenter in the decades gone. And when such values bring out valuable products and solutions to problems, the position of the university as the conscience of the nation was established.

So, can Kenyan universities still be regarded as the conscience of our nation? To what extent have they pursued the fundamental values of the traditional university and the moral values of the

universe? Do our universities exercise sapiential authority with autocracy, nepotism and ideological intolerance? It might be hard to answer these questions in the affirmative. But I should say that the universities are trying their best in very difficult situations. Most of our scholars have been pushed to the backseat of the development train, to the extent that our youth think that the primary function of government is to give them business opportunities and not to educate them. Universities must never be a distant appendage of the state; they nurture our conscience along with the Church!



Students' Corner: EBESA

EBESA
CAREER
Talk

28TH MARCH 2024

T H E M E:
CAREER EXPLORATION AND NETWORKING

LT 401
UoN Towers

- Emerging trends and challenges in environmental engineering
- Career pathways and opportunities in biosystems engineering
- Innovations in agricultural engineering and sustainable farming practices
- The role of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing environmental and agricultural issues

CALL FOR ARTICLES

DEADLINE 3RD MARCH

THEME: SUSTAINABLE AUTOMATION

TARGET SECTORS

- Designing Urban Cities and Infrastructure
- Process Industries
- Food and Precision Agriculture
- Environmental Sustainability and Climate Adaptation
- Renewable energies
- Use of Tech in solving environmental problems

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JEAE

Journal of Engineering in Agriculture and the Environment

The Journal of Engineering in Agriculture and the Environment (JEAE) is a Publication of the Kenya Society of Environmental, Biological and Agricultural Engineers (KeSEBAE) through which researchers in the fields of Environment, Agriculture and related fields share research information and findings with their peers from around the globe.

The JEAE Editorial Board wishes to invite interested researchers with complete work in any relevant topic, to submit their papers for publication in the next editions of the Journal.

Manuscripts may be submitted online or via email to:

Chairperson, JEAE Editorial Board via Email: jeae@kesebae.or.ke or Online via: <https://kesebae.or.ke/journal/index.php/kesebae/about/submissions>

Criteria for Article Selection

Priority in the selection of articles for publication is that the articles:

- a. Are written in the English language
- b. Are relevant to the application of engineering and technology in agriculture, the environment and biological systems
- c. Have not been previously published elsewhere, or, if previously published are supported by a copyright permission
- d. Deals with theoretical, practical and adoptable innovations applicable to engineering and technology in agriculture, the environment and biological systems
- e. Have a 150 to 250 words abstract, preceding the main body of the article
- f. The abstract should be followed by the list of 4 to 8 "Key Words"
- g. Manuscript should be single-spaced, under 4,000 words (approximately equivalent to 5-6 pages of A4-size paper)
- h. Should be submitted in both MS word (2010 or later versions) and pdf formats (i.e., authors submit the abstract and key words in MS Word and pdf after which author uploads the entire manuscript in MS word and pdf)
- i. Are supported by authentic sources, references or bibliography

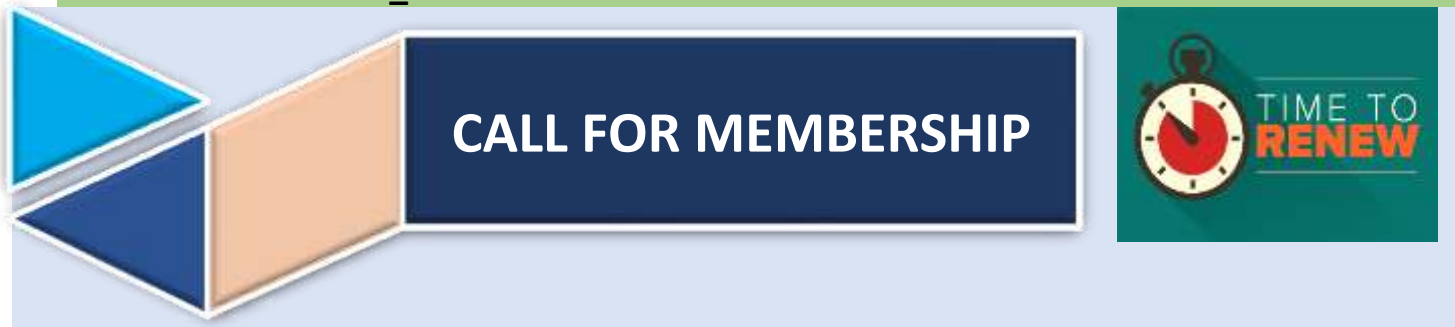
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CALL FOR ARTICLES TO KeSEBAE NEWS

KeSEBAE NEWS Editorial wishes to call for topical articles for publication in future editions of KeSEBAE NEWS.

Please transmit the same via Email: info@kesebae.or.ke

NOTE: A payment will be made to the author of each selected article



Be a KeSEBAE Member:

The annual subscription fees, admission fees and reinstatement fees for members of all grades (except Honorary and Life Members who shall pay no dues or fees) are indicated below: The annual dues are as follows:

Membership Category	Annual Subscription (KES)	Admission Fees (KES)	Reinstatement Fees (KES)
<i>Fellow</i>	5,000	1,000	2,000
<i>Member</i>	2,000	1,000	2,000
<i>Ass.Member</i>	1,000	1,000	2,000
<i>Aff.Member</i>	500	1,000	2,000
<i>Student</i>	300	100	-

Membership Renewal

Members of all grades are requested to renew their 2024 membership as follows.

Membership Category	Annual Subscription Fee (KES)
<i>Fellow</i>	5,000
<i>Member</i>	2,000
<i>Ass. Member</i>	1,000
<i>Aff. Member</i>	500
<i>Student Member</i>	300

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