Varsity reforms: Are they genuine?

BY Faith Muiruri and M’MOLO BULEMI.

Acting on recommendations made by the Public Universities Inspection Board appointed to review statuses establishing public universities in the country, the Government on May 3, announced the elevation of eight colleges to offer degree programmes in liaison with public universities.

Four institutions were elevated to university colleges and four others into university campuses to offer degree programmes under public universities.

But it emerges that this announcement came long after most of those "new university colleges" were already at it. They are not new in the world of liaisons with public universities, and perhaps were only waiting for this announcement by the Government.

Among those earmarked for this new status, it has been confirmed that Kisii Campus of Egerton University which becomes Kisii University College still under Egerton, Kimathi Institute of Technology which becomes Kimathi University College under the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT).

The Kenya Science Teachers' College which becomes a constituent campus of the University of Nairobi and the Mombasa Polytechnic which will henceforth offer degree programmes under the JKUAT were all in liaison with the universities they have been attached to.

Kimathi university college

As we sought to establish how prepared Kimathi Institute of Technology was to its new status, the college confirmed that it had already rolled out its degree programme and the first batch of 40 students were admitted when the college entered into liaison with the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) as early as in May 2006.

The college, situated along Nyeri Nyahururu Road, six kilometres from the town embarked on a program to be upgraded to university status three years ago and it has been offering the Bachelor of Science degree in Information Technology and Bachelor of Commerce in Business Studies in collaboration with JKUAT.

At the time of the announcement, KIT was planning to expand the manifold of its degree programmes to include Bachelor of Science in Electrical and Electronics Engineering and Bachelor of Construction Management.

The Principal Mr Joseph Mbugua says the college had also put in place machinery both physical and personnel to meet the new demand.

“We had embarked on the process of making our application for university charter from the Commission for Higher Education (CHE). The announcement will in fact hasten the process of implementing these programmes,” he told the Education Times.
The admission of University students came shortly after the institute unveiled a Sh7.2 billion upgrading plan in 2005. The plan which was unveiled by the Minister for Information Mutahi Kagwe will be implemented in three phases. Among earmarked projects include the employment of more lecturers and improve learning facilities.

The college has a student population of 10,000.

The college is confident that it will manage the its new status, and looks forward to coming up with 38 degree programs to be run under 20 departments.

Internationally, the Institute has already entered into collaboration with the College of Rockies (COTR) and Parklands College (PRC) in Canada. Plans are also underway to launch an exchange programme with College of Rockies. "The college will soon send some interns to Kimathi Institute to in a move that will act as a linkage with other International organisations to facilitate its upgrading increased role in community development," he added.

Mr Mbugua says a proposal has jointly been submitted for funding by CIDA and Association of Canadian Community College.

The funding will support the development of training in tourism, as a boost to the growing tourism industry.

The joint programme will also integrate basic health education, prevention and awareness at college and community projects in Nyeri.

President Mwai Kibaki is the chairman of the Institute’s Board of Trustees and all Members of Parliament and local authorities in the district are board of trustees.

The Nyeri District Community through its elected Members of parliament have supported the initiative to upgrade Kimathi Institute to university status.

All Constituency Development Fund kitties have agreed to pump more at least seven per cent of their allocation during this financial year to help in the construction of the college's resource centre.

Kimathi Institute was founded by the community in the early 1970s to undertake human capacity development for the community so as to support economic and social development.

The student population at the Institute has grown from 250 to 1,150 following the introduction of the degree courses.

The Principal says the Institute has applied for a Sh100 million loan which if granted, will go towards the expansion of lecture halls and hostels to accommodate the increasing number of students.