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TALES OF LECHEROUS LECTURERS

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At 23 years of age, Sunshine had the world at her feet. She had enrolled at Makerere University, and was performing well - until Prof Andama came on the scene.

Prof Andama, a brilliant lecturer who taught without referring to his notes but was known for preying on his female students, first spotted Sunshine during one of his "I-hand-your-coursework-to-you-individually" routines.

Having taken a fancy to the girl, Prof Andama asked her to visit his office; the visits became routine. But Sunshine found she could still not score more than 15 marks in Prof Andama's assignments; he deliberately failed her so that she would return to seek his help, at which point he promised to give her better marks on her next visit.

After Prof Andama had taken advantage of Sunshine and engaged in unprotected sex with her, she metamorphosed into a lost soul stripped of her innocence, infected with the dreaded HIV/Aids virus, robbed of her resolve to complete her education, and generally disillusioned with life. Eventually, she took her life.

This is a fictional story but Sunshine's experience, as narrated by Makerere University student Beatrice Lamwaka in a new book *Students Aloud: Illuminating Creative Voices*, mirrors a situation that is common at most universities in East Africa: lecturers taking advantage of their students' vulnerability to satisfy their sexual cravings.

The story emerges in the form of a letter to the now departed Sunshine, in which her friend narrates the challenges she is facing in her bid to achieving their shared dream of getting a masters degree before the age of 30.

From the narration, the two friends seemed to have been marginalised in about all aspects of their lives at the university; first, because they are females, who are in a minority even among the lecturer population; and, second, because the two girls are Acholis, a community that has unfairly earned a reputation for brutality owing to the 20-year civil war between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army.

Their being Acholi becomes such a contentious issue that Michael, Sunshine's friend's boyfriend, is told never to take "that Kony girl" to his parents' home because "she hails from a tribe that kills each other, forces children to murder. Oh! She might serve the children for lunch."

The narrator blames the university for such stereotypes as it "teaches us to discriminate against each other" by encouraging students to form associations on tribal grounds like the Acholi Makerere University Association, rather than encourage them to associate at a more individual level.

It is such issues that the book, which comprises short stories, poems and graphic art, attempts to address in an informal manner by letting students from universities in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania recount their experiences.

In her synopsis of the book, Wanjiku Kuria-Mwangi says: "The real value of this collection is that it asks questions of authorities and leaders across the society. If they say they value higher education, then why not prove this by buying current books, making the halls and libraries look good and at least, paying lecturers some decent wages?"

Students Aloud comes across as a window into the challenges that marginalised students in the region face in higher institutions of learning.

Students Aloud and Educational Pathways in East Africa: Scaling a Difficult Terrain were launched this month in Nairobi by the Ford Foundation, which sponsored the Association for the Advancement of Higher Education and Development (Ahead) to do the research that culminated in three books about the challenges facing higher education in East Africa. The third book Illuminating Student Voices in Higher Education was launched in Kampala.

Educational Pathways complements Students Aloud with studies of the effect that the various barriers faced by students have had on enrolment and completion rates.

Education Pathways editor and executive director of Ahead Uganda, Anne-Marea Griffin, said the book "focuses on that body of the student population who drop out before starting school, those who manage to enter but shortly lose their footing, and those who stagger forward and only barely manage to complete their degree."

"Within this target group of troubled individuals," Ms Griffin writes, "the predicament of females, especially rural girls, will be the focal point. While the number of women admitted to university have increased over the years, they continue to be under-represented in academic and administrative positions, at the university level."

In the seven universities used as case studies for Educational Pathways, statistics show a low enrolment of women in the 2005/6 academic year: Makerere University, 45.8 per cent; Kenya's Hubert Kariuki Memorial University, 45.3 per cent; Moi University, 30 per cent; University of Nairobi, 29 per cent; Tanzania's Sokoine University of Agriculture, 28.7 per cent; University of Dar es Salaam, 28.5 per cent; and Uganda's Gulu University, 23 per cent.

With such low enrolment figures, female students who complete university account for no more than 0.6 of every 100 students who enter primary school in Tanzania (1.9 per cent in Uganda, and 3.5 per cent in Kenya), says The Educational Pipeline in East Africa (2002) report.

In Illuminating Student Voices' in Higher Education, students write on the challenges of staying in privately day-owned hostels, the effects of increased enrolment on learning and academic progress, the consequences of employing the

same lecturers for day and evening lectures, and the anxiety felt by students in private universities about their chances of competing on the job market with those from public universities.

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