

# Relevance of Alumni Organizations to the Students and the University: A Case Study of Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya

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## Abstract

This paper sought to establish the relevance of the Moi University (MU) alumni organization to the students and the university in a bid to find out whether the present and the future alumni linkages are vibrant and intact. The study aimed at answering the following questions: What is Alumni Association? What role does it play in the University? What role does it play in the society at large? What benefits does one get by joining the alumni group? How old is the Moi University Alumni Association? Does Moi University Alumni Association have a Mission, Vision / or Motto? What benefits does Moi University get from the Moi University Alumni Association? What are the objectives of the MU Alumni Association? Are all objectives currently achieved by Moi University Alumni Association? What are some of the challenges faced by the Moi University Alumni Association? How does the Alumni association raise its funds? What are some of the projects that the Moi University Alumni Association has initiated? Does MU Alumni Association collaborate with other Universities abroad? Does Moi University Alumni Association have a Strategic Plan? The study findings are beneficial to other researchers and people generally interested in information about university, college and school alumni.

**Key words:** Moi University, Alumni Association, MUAA, Strategic Plan, Collaborations

## 1. Introduction

The interdependence between the child and the mother is indispensable. Similarly the University-college alumni need their respective graduating universities to continue to mentor and guide them not only in the pursuit of their careers but keep in touch with each other through their alumni office. Many things happen in our post-university lives which we need to know like promotions, deaths, weddings and various developments at our former universities. Visits to the school where one once learned is refreshing and reuniting. One feels good to hear that your college-mate won a distinguished award, is a government minister, bishop or even the new head of your former department, dean of faculty or the vice chancellor of your university. This paper assesses the performance of Moi University Alumni Association with a view of adding to the already existing knowledge about the ideals of administering alumni associations.

## 2. Methodology

The data for this study was collected through questionnaire and a focused group discussion with the staff at the Moi University Alumni Association. The author engaged his informants with regard to their day to day activities, monthly plans and yearly plans with a view of finding out whether the set long term and short term objectives are adhered to.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 The concept of 'Alumni Association'

According to one of the respondents at the Moi University Alumni Association office, an Alumni Association refers to a part of the organization that deals with bringing together of current and past members with the aim of pooling resources together towards the success of that organization.

### 3.2 Role of Alumni Associations

#### 3.2.1 The University

The respondents interviewed said that the role of any alumni association at the university is to mobilise former graduates to participate more actively in the university business. According to them, the alumni can contribute ideas towards the betterment of the university as well as participate directly or indirectly in activities within the university.

#### 3.2.2 Society

The respondents interviewed averred that university alumni contribute to the society by marketing of university products so that the members of the society can benefit from what universities have to offer.

### 3.3 Moi University Alumni Association

#### 3.3.1 Benefits of Membership to an Alumni Association

Membership to the Moi University Alumni Association (MUAA) are categorised into five as follows:

1. Ordinary membership: Graduates of Moi University
2. Associate membership: Graduates of other universities employed by Moi University
3. Affiliate membership: Graduates of other universities with interest in Moi University

4. Special membership: parents of past/present students, well-wishers, friends and development partners
5. Honorary membership: Chancellor, Council members, Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Principals, Professors and Academic Staff present and past at Moi University.

According to one of the respondents, the university stands to gain more from an alumni association. However, individuals who join the association are given membership certificates which acknowledge their belonging to a professional association which in turn could boost their career prospects. In addition, members are able to get first-hand information on important upcoming events and university programmes that could be of great benefit to them.

In addition, a formal registration and membership to the Moi University Alumni Association (MUAA) guarantees one the opportunity to be appraised both as a graduate of the University and an employee outside the University. This appraisal is done through the **Moi University Alumni Association Employee and Employer Questionnaire**. The questionnaire reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the Moi University graduates at their workplace and helps the graduates better their career competence. They also reveal the quality of graduates that the university produces (A further analysis of the contents of the questionnaire is done later in the paper).

### **3.3.2 Benefits of MUAA to Moi University**

According to the respondents, the MUAA contributes to the attainment of the goals of the University through marketing of its programmes among other products of the university. The interviewed staff members of the MUAA said that recently, the Association helped to refurbish seats at the Margaret Thatcher Library, the university library. MUAA also offers platforms for current students and alumni members to exchange ideas on academics and careers by holding discussion benches, among other benefits. According to the interviewees, the MUAA obtains funds for these activities from the amounts contributed by members during recruitments and the subsequent subscriptions. The university also support the MUAA through the convocation fee. Other sources of funding for MUAA include sale of promotional items such as t-shirts and caps.

### **3.3.3 How old is MUAA?**

From the General Information bulletin given to the author by the interviewed members of MUAA staff, the Association was established under the Moi University Act of 1984. Since then, the university enjoys alumni membership serving Nationally and Internationally in various professional capacities.

### **3.3.4 MUAA vision**

The MUAA mission, as stated in the MUAA brochure (n.d.) is:

To be a leader in promoting and developing the University and community, Nationally and Internationally

### **3.3.5 MUAA Mission**

The MUAA mission, as stated in the MUAA brochure (n.d.) is:

To enhance participation of alumni members in assisting the University in the promotion and development of curricula and co-curricular activities by using their talents and resources to achieve national and international image in teaching, research and extension

### **3.3.6 Core Values**

The core values of MUAA are: Dedication, Team Spirit, Effectiveness and Efficiency.

### **3.3.7 Objectives of the MUAA**

The objectives of MUAA are to promote alumni involvement in university activities through:

- Resource mobilisation to support programmes of the university
- Marketing the university programmes and activities
- Soliciting for scholarships and bursaries
- Supporting schools, directorates and alumni
- Advancing interests and promotion of welfare of MUAA members
- Endowment fund

On being asked to state whether or not these objectives have been achieved in the Association, the interviewees gave their responses as follows:

On resource mobilisation, the respondents said that the strategic plan which is being drafted will identify some of the ways in which funds can be obtained to aid MUAA activities. On marketing of university activities, the respondents indicated that the association had not achieved much. Moreover, the association had not done much in soliciting for scholarships and bursaries. With regard to supporting schools and directorates and alumni, the Association had aided the School of Business and that of Geography by giving funds to school association committees for functions. The association also helped in collating personal details which schools gain access to in order to do follow-up of their graduates. The objective on advancing interests and promotion of welfare of MUAA members was predicated on registration by the alumni. Nevertheless, nothing had been done with respect to endowment fund.

### **3.3.8 Challenges faced by MUAA**

Some of the challenges mentioned by the interviewees included:

- Difficulties in getting members to participate in the activities of the Association. The respondents said some of the members, though registered, were too busy in their jobs to pay any attention to MUAA activities.
- Lack of incentives to members and the entire association by the university.
- The fact that the convocation fee goes directly to the university account poses a challenge to smooth running of some operations. The interviewees said that the process of obtaining funds from the University for MUAA activities was tedious and hectic hence it took a long time to procure funds at the right time to run some important functions.
- The online access to MUAA databank was not properly maintained. The interviewees said the software used was not advanced.

### **3.3.9 Sources of Funds**

The MUAA raises funds through various activities in and outside of the university. Some of the sources mentioned included sales of MUAA branded items such as t-shirts and caps, the convocation fee, registration/recruitment fee, and annual subscription from members. The interviewees said that a funds committee is in the process of being constituted to come up with other ways of raising funds apart from the ones already mentioned.

Each of the five membership groups earlier mentioned contributes varied amounts as recruitment fee which go into funding the activities of the Association. The current contributions, as indicated in the MUAA brochure, are as shown below.

1. Ordinary membership: Ksh 1000 per member upon graduating
2. Associate membership: Ksh 10000 per member payable once
3. Affiliate membership: Ksh 10000 per member payable once
4. Special membership: Ksh 10000 per member payable once
5. Honorary membership: Ksh 30000 per member payable once

### **3.3.10 Current Projects**

The MUAA interviewees said that the Association was involved in a number of projects aimed at achieving its objectives as already stated. These projects included the following:

- Students' discussion benches
- Refurbishing of University library seats
- Sales and promotions of the MUAA
- Production of brochures among other written materials for improving the image and perception of the Association by members and other potential alumni
- Advertising of its activities and the products of the University
- Organising events, annual calendars, AGMs to bring members together.

### **3.3.10 Collaborations**

When asked to state if the MUAA collaborates with or benchmarks other universities abroad, the interviewees were on the affirmative. Nevertheless, they could not mention the names of the said universities. However, one of them said that the previous year, the Chairperson to MUAA attended an alumni event in South Africa as part of the agenda to raising funds for the Association.

### **3.3.11 Strategic Plan**

The interviewed respondents acknowledged that the Association did not have a strategic plan but plans were underway to come up with one saying that a meeting had already been set by the patron. The respondents said the operations of Association were being guided by the MUAA constitution and the University policies.

### **3.3.12 Contents of MUAA Questionnaires**

#### **3.3.12.1 Employer Questionnaire**

The employer questionnaire seeks information such as:

- Name of the organization/institution
- Location
- The number of university graduates hired in the past ten years
- The employers' rating of graduates in terms of preparedness on first appointment
- The number of Moi University graduates hired per level of education (i.e. Diploma, First Degree, Masters and PhD)
- Employer's level of satisfaction with Moi University graduates
- The length of stay at work of Moi university graduates after appointment
- Promotion within the organizational ranks (with reasons in either case)
- Duration of work before promotion
- Whether Moi University graduates showed sufficient skills and understanding of job needs

- Strengths, weaknesses and threats
- Level of technological background and impact on the job performance of Moi University graduates
- Adaptability and receptiveness to new technologies
- Character gauge in terms of: ability to cope with work, moral uprightness and ethics, socialization, general knowledge of current issues, time consciousness, religious affiliation/devotion, physical fitness, leadership skills, mastery of skills (on-job training) and family issues
- Deficiency of training
- Contributions to the profession while in service (to the organization, to the community, professional associations, other organizations, religious bodies, political bodies and their mother-institution, i.e. Moi University)
- General opinion on the curriculum rendered at Moi University and the kind of graduates the University produces

### 3.3.12.2 *Employee Questionnaire*

The employee questionnaire seeks the personal details of the respondent, including the year of graduation and the course undertaken at the university. The specific questions on career assessment touch on the following areas:

- How much the employee thinks the university programme prepared them for: their first job, current job, and/or self employment
- Involvement in continuing education
- The most helpful and applicable things learnt from the programme undertaken at Moi University
- Courses the employees wish they had undertaken or been offered by the University during their years of study
- Coherence with job requirements based on training received at Moi University
- Whether the employee is currently specialising in their area of study or area of interest, and why
- Reasons for choosing Moi University as the university to study; and whether or not they would still make the same decision, given a chance
- If Moi University met their expectations
- Involvement in their former school/faculty (in areas such as curriculum review, accreditation review, philanthropic initiatives, students' mentorship among others)
- Whether they received course and career counselling while in Moi University
- Input in the course of study during the years of study
- If they had a particular faculty advisor
- Their rating of the advising process in Moi University
- If the programme studied was helpful in getting a job or starting own business
- Interaction with academic counsellor/advisor
- Mentorship state of the advisors
- Approachability of faculty members
- Their rating of faculty members' expertise in their work
- Registration status with MUAA
- Areas to help an alumnus of Moi University such as: alumni relations and networking; advancement activities on behalf of the university; participating in future planning for MUAA; fundraising; giving donations; planning events; lectures, symposia, career networking, graduate student recruitment, mentorship programmes, leadership training, religious activities, games and sporting activities among others
- Any other issues the employees wish Moi University addresses

## 4. CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

Moi University Alumni Association has made notable progress since its inception in 1984 but in comparison with other universities in Europe and the USA, it has a long way to go in terms of its administrative mechanisms, sensitization, marketing, collective involvement, communication, fund raising and branding. In particular, the following needs to be done:

- a) Development of a strategic plan
- b) Owning an account of its own
- c) Improvement on collaboration with other universities and borrow ideas from universities with known success stories
- d) Improvement on recruitments, sensitization, regular communication with the alumni, honour and involve alumni in its activities

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