

Genesis, evolution and current thrusts of Soroti University

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Abstract

Elders from Teso sub region in Eastern Uganda nursed a dream that one day, they would have a University in their area. This dream came true on 11th December 2011 when Uganda Government decided to set up a Public University known as Soroti University, located in Teso sub-region. The University was established by Statutory Instrument No. 34 of July 2015 as the 9th Public University under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act of 2001 as amended. Soroti University is governed by the University Council and Council Committees plus Senate and its Committees as stated the act. Based on its Vision of being an institution of Professionals and Innovators, the Niche of Soroti University is to provide knowledge, skills and innovations in applied sciences. The University's thematic areas are: - Health Sciences; Engineering and Technology; Renewable Energy; Applied Science and Science Education; Value addition courses and Food Science and Technology and currently has a population of 474 students.

Key words: Applied Sciences, Energy, Innovators, Nuclear Science, Soroti University, Tropical Medicine, Uganda

RÉSUMÉ

Les anciens de la sous-région de Teso, dans l'est de l'Ouganda, nourrissaient le rêve qu'un jour, une université serait établie dans leur localité. Ce rêve s'est concrétisé le 11 décembre 2011 lorsque le gouvernement ougandais a décidé de créer une université publique connue sous le nom d'Université de Soroti, située dans la sous-région de Teso. L'Université a été établie par l'Instrument Statutaire N° 34 de juillet 2015 en tant que 9ème université publique en vertu de la loi sur les universités et autres institutions tertiaires de 2001, telle que modifiée. L'Université de Soroti est régie par le Conseil de l'université et les comités du conseil, ainsi que par le Sénat et ses comités, comme stipulé dans la loi. Fondée sur sa vision de devenir une institution de professionnels et d'innovateurs, la niche de l'Université de Soroti est de fournir des connaissances, des compétences et des innovations dans les sciences appliquées. Les domaines thématiques de l'université incluent : les sciences de la santé ; l'ingénierie et la technologie ; l'énergie renouvelable ; les sciences appliquées et l'éducation scientifique ; les cours de valorisation et la science et la technologie alimentaires. Elle compte actuellement 474 étudiants.

Mots-clés : Sciences appliquées, Énergie, Innovateurs, Science nucléaire, Université de Soroti, Médecine tropicale, Ouganda

Introduction

For about 50 years, elders from Teso subregion in Uganda nursed a dream that one day, they will have an institution of higher learning in their area. This they demonstrated by securing land in Arapai area near Soroti City, the hub of Teso district administration since 1914. Most notable of the elders was Mzee Epaku. Light at the end of the tunnel started appearing when Teso College Aloet was built in 1953 under the leadership of Mr. Sasoon, a Jew.

The College was given land of slightly over 1,000 acres. Five years later in 1958 an agricultural training centre was opened at Arapai. The administration allocated it 630 acres of land. These developments took advantage of the earlier British military and civil facilities at Teso College West and the Railway Station. Teso College West was a military Camp for the British Army for Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Strategically it was the location in Teso that the British used as a collection ground.

For the years that went by, this region went on with the two institutions namely: Teso College Aloet and Arapai Agricultural College still with the hope of getting a higher institution of learning. These hopes resurrected in the 1980s when there was a new attempt to establish a public university, but this effort equally failed due to circumstances that befell the nation at that time.

During the 1990s another round of activity to open the university started and one after another but without any success. The notable initiative Central to the failures was lack of sufficient funds required to open and sustain the institution. Despite the good will from the National Council for Higher Education that offered operational license twice, all these efforts passed but hope was not faded. Instead attention was redirected to government for consideration.

Acceptance by the Uganda Government to grant a public University was fulfilled when on 11th December 2011 His Excellency, the President of Uganda, at State House announced before a delegation of politicians, academicians and cultural leaders the Government position to establish a public university in Teso sub-region.

In June 2012, the Minister responsible for Education and Sports appointed the members of the Taskforce to spearhead the establishment of the University. The Minister of Education and Sports, Hon. Jessica Alupo launched the Task Force on 4th September 2012 at a colorful ceremony attended by Minister for Teso Affairs, Members of Parliament, Academicians, various professionals in Engineering, Education, Medicine, and District Local Governments officials.

Soroti University, by Statutory Instrument No. 34 of July 2015 became a fully-fledged Public University under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act of 2001 as amended. By the instrument Soroti University became the 9th Public University in the country. The University is located in Soroti district, seven (7) kilometers from Soroti town along 'Moroto Road.

Section 24 (2) of the Universities and Other Tertiary institutions Act, 2001 (as amended in, 2006) outlines the functions of a University as:

- a) Provision of higher education, promotion of research and advancement of learning; and,
- b) Dissemination of knowledge and giving opportunity of acquiring higher education to all persons

including persons with disabilities wishing to do so regardless of race, political opinion, colour, creed, or sex, and provision of accessible physical facilities to the users of the Public University.

Strategic Direction of Soroti University. The University Vision is A university of Professionals and Innovators with the Mission To provide knowledge, skills and innovations for inclusive sustainable development and transformation; The University Motto is to Innovate and create. In fulfilment of the vision and strategic goal, the University believes in and cherishes a set of principles and values that underpin its mission. These values define the University's culture in dealing with clients as well as conduct and relationship with one another. These include:

- A. Team work- We seek to understand how we can best support each other and make choices that put team before individual performance
- B. Integrity- We act in harmony with our deeply held beliefs and values
- C. Inclusiveness- We respect diversity of opinions, racial differences, gender, faith, people with different physical abilities and different political ideologies
- D. Responsiveness- We shall respond to our clients in timely manner
- E. Creativity - we are inspired to bring our imagination to life

Strategic Mandate. The strategic mandate of Soroti University is derived from the charge given to the University by the Government of Uganda and Needs Assessment Survey undertaken by the University Management in December 2012 which led to focus on the following thematic areas:

- A. Health Sciences (Medicine, Nursing, Allied Health)
- B. Engineering and Technology, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
- C. Renewable Energy, Electricity and Electronics
- D. Applied Science and Science Education (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, ICT, Sports Science and Education)
- E. Value addition courses in short term and academic diploma/degree
- F. Food Science and Technology

Governance and Organizational Structure. On 28th July 2017 the First Soroti University Council was inaugurated under the chairmanship of Mr F.X Lubanga. The University Council is the supreme organ of the University and as such it is responsible for the overall administration of the objects and functions of the University. The framework within which the Soroti University works is based upon the Universities and Other Tertiary Act 2001 as amended in 2006. The University is headed by a Chancellor who is the titular head of the Institution. Soroti University is governed by the University Council and Council Committees as well as Senate and its Committees. The University Council committees include Appointments Board, Estates and Works Committee, Quality Assurance, Finance, Planning and Development Committee, Audit and Risk Committee, and Students' Affairs and Disciplinary Committee.

Central administration. A team of administrators headed by the Vice Chancellor and other administrators and support staff. The students are headed by the Guild. The key Administration departments include: Vice Chancellor Office; Office of Deputy Vice Chancellor; University Secretary Office; Human Resources Directorate; Office of Academic Registrar; Directorate of Research and Innovations; Office the University Bursar; Procurement and Disposal Unit; Internal Audit Unit; Food and Cafeteria Services; Office of Dean of Students; University Chaplain Anglican; University Chaplain Roman Catholics; The Muslim Chaplain (University Imam); University Counsellor; University Computing Services; Directorate of Estates; Security Department; Health Services Department; and Directorate of Planning.

Academic Programmes. Currently the University has 474 students pursuing the following accredited academic Programmes: Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery; Bachelor of Nursing Science; Bachelor of Engineering in Electronics and Computer Engineering; Bachelor of Physiotherapy Programme; Bachelor of Medical Laboratory Sciences Programme; and Bachelor of Science in Accounting, Finance, and Computing (BAFC) Programme. Planned Programmes to start after 2025/26 include Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical and Electronics Engineering; BSc. Biomedical Engineering; Bachelor of Dentistry; Bachelor of Pharmacy; Bachelor of Midwifery (BMW); Bachelor of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering (MME); Bachelor of Civil and Structural Engineering (BCSE); Bachelor of Science in Multimedia Technology and Design; BSc. Physics Engineering; BSc. Electrical and Renewable Energy; BSc. Industrial Engineering; Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering; Bachelor of Science in Mechatronics Engineering; Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering; Bachelor of Engineering in Aeronautical Engineering; BSc in Gastronomy and Culinary Sciences; Courses for Professionals and Gastronomy enthusiasts; and Master of Science in Nuclear Engineering.

Mandate of Academic Units in the University

School of Medicine and Health Sciences. The core objectives of the school are to:

- i. Provide adequate Learning /Teaching Facilities and resources for the training of medical students and other essential health professionals in Uganda.
- ii. Award Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (Medicine Baccalaureus e.t Baccalaureus Chirurgical) (M.B.Ch.B) degrees to successful Medical Students, and relevant degrees to other health Professionals such as Biomedical scientist, Pharmacists, Nurses, Dentists and Allied Health Professionals.
- iii. Provide model Medical Practices as well as specialized services in major specialties and priority sub-specialty disciplines.
- iv. Provide effective referral, emergency and rehabilitative health care services.
- v. Provide postgraduate training in selected specialties and priority sub-specialties.
- vi. Carry out essential health research on priority health problems.
- vii. Establish linkages with local, regional and international partners and institutions that foster collaboration in clinical instruction, research and other best practices.
- viii. Contribute to improved health status of all Ugandans.

The following Departments are in the School of Health Sciences

- i. Department of Pathology
- ii. Department of Anatomy
- iii. Department of Biochemistry,
- iv. Department of Medical Informatics
- v. Department of Orthopedics
- vi. Department of Nursing Sciences
- vii. Department of Ear, Nose and Throat Surgery
- viii. Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
- ix. Department of Internal Medicine
- x. Department of Primary Health Care
- xi. Department of Surgery
- xii. Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology
- xiii. Department of Pharmacy and pharmacology
- xiv. Department of Dentistry
- xv. Department of Radiology
- xvi. Department of Department of Paediatrics
- xvii. Department of Anaesthesia
- xviii. Department of Public Health
- xix. Department of Laboratory Sciences

School of Engineering and Technology

The core objectives of the school are to:

- i. Train high level manpower in Engineering
- ii. Conduct cutting edge Engineering research
- iii. Offer consultancy and outreach services in areas of Engineering and Technology
- iv. Develop and maintain linkages with other Institutions and stakeholders for mutual benefits

The following Departments are in the School Engineering and Technology

- i. Department of Electronic and Computer Engineering
- ii. Department of Computer Science and Informatics
- iii. Department of Mechanical and Mechatronic Engineering
- iv. Department of Biomedical Engineering
- v. Department of Electrical and Energy Engineering

School of Applied Sciences and Science Education. The core objectives of the school are to:

- i. Provides instruction to students seeking a wards in areas of Science Education Applied Science. ii. Conduct cutting edge research in Science Education Applied Science
- iii. Offer consultancy and outreach services in areas of Science Education Applied Science.
- iv. Develop and maintain linkages with other Institutions and stakeholders for mutual benefits
- v. Provides instruction to students seeking a wards in areas of Business Sciences and Economics vii. Conduct cutting edge research in Business Sciences and Economics

- vi. Offer consultancy and outreach services in areas of Business Sciences and Economics
- vii. Develop and maintain linkages with other Institutions and stakeholders for mutual benefits

The following Departments are in the School of Applied Sciences and Science Education

- i. Department of Educational Planning Management and Administration
- ii. Department of Foundations of Education
- iii. Department of Physics
- iv. Department of Chemistry
- v. Department of Biology
- vi. Department of Mathematics
- vii. Department of Curriculum and Instruction
- viii. Department of Educational Psychology
- ix. Department of Sport Science
- x. Department of Economics
- xi. Department of Geography
- xii. Department of Computer Studies

Food Innovation Institute. The core objectives of the Institute are to:

- i. To train professionals who are specialized in culinary techniques and also to manage hospitality establishment
- ii. To develop and offer courses in the following areas:
 - a. Food technology
 - b. General Business knowledge
 - c. Event Management
 - d. Gastronomy
 - e. Culinary Management
 - f. Languages in hospitality sector

Open and distance Learning Department. Soroti University has established the Open, Distance and e-Learning department and policy with the aim of mainstreaming e-Learning into all its academic Programmes to promote blended and quality technology supported learning. The ODeL unit is mandated to carry out the following functions:

- i. Provide support to all the academic and administrative units in the university in ODeL delivered Programme development, delivery, management, and administration
- ii. Train academic staff in the development of quality blended online course content
- iii. Provide educational technology support to all academic units
- iv. Sensitize, train and support students in using ODeL modes of study
- v. Manage and coordinate ODeL off-campus study activities (when created, when need arises) in liaison with the Academic Registrar's office, and
- vi. Undertake research and publications in the field of OdeL

The University Library. The University Library was established in 2019 to provide information service support to staff and students and enable them access information and knowledge required in their courses and self-fulfillment, research and current affairs. The Library has a policy. The University services are dispensed in two related libraries i.e. the print library and virtual library housed in the same block but different rooms. The primary purpose of this department is to support the teaching and learning function of the University. The Library service was established alongside the start of the teaching departments. The library offers online information literacy Programme, trains students and staff in information searches and offers lending, reference and information advisory services.

Sport and Leisure Centre. University Sports and Leisure Centre is responsible for all sports organized at Soroti University. The University Leisure Sports Centre manages all the facilities, determines and evaluates the sports policy of the Soroti University and the university's relations with other universities and both nationally and internationally.

Technology incubation and acceleration Centre. In keeping with its Moto to “create and innovate,” the Centre is an interdisciplinary research unit of the University which works to advance the theory and practice of entrepreneurial wealth creation.

The Directorate of Graduate Studies, Research and Innovations (DGSRI). The Directorate of Graduate Studies, Research and Innovations (DGSRI) was established on August 3, 2023 when the Ministry of Public Service approved the adjusted structure of Soroti University. The mandate of DGSRI is to coordinate, support and manage graduate studies, research and innovations at university level. Research, scholarship, and creative works are some of the strategic focus areas engrained in Soroti University Strategic Plan 2020/2021-2024/2025

Focus Priority Areas for Research and Innovations. The areas of focus for research and innovations identified and prioritized by Soroti University for the period from 2024/2025 to 2028/2029 are broad. The areas of focus for research and innovations are in four categories, namely: Health and allied health systems, engineering and technology, institutional development and cross-cutting research areas. For all these categories, research shall transcend, where applicable, from basic to applied through to translational and developmental research.

Health and allied health systems research. In the period from 2024/2025 to 2028/2029, Soroti University shall focus on research that addresses linkages between health, environment and disease, and how healthy people can be supported to remain healthy in their eco-system. The priority areas for research in health and allied health systems, therefore, are: Infectious diseases; Non-communicable diseases including life style diseases, cancers, injuries and mental health; Nursing/midwifery service provisioning and delivery; Public health and population education models; Health services provisioning, including health financing; leadership, governance, and policies; Rapid diagnostics and forensics; One Health approach, including antimicrobial resistance, nutraceuticals, food safety and Zoonoses (i.e., those diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans

and vice versa); Child, adolescent and reproductive health; Geriatrics; Physiotherapy; Indigenous knowledge systems in healthcare, including herbal medicines and traditional animal-derived medicines; and Climate change and health nexus.

Engineering and Technology research. In the period from 2024/2025 to 2028/2029, Soroti University shall prioritize research in engineering and technology that supports knowledge-based economy for industrialization, import substitution, and value added exports and acceleration of productivity. The priority areas for research and innovations in engineering and technology, therefore, are: Artificial intelligence; robotics and machine learning technologies; Nuclear science and engineering; Humanitarian engineering; Design and road works; Food processing and industrial technology; Material and packaging science; Geo-technical and foundation engineering; Renewable energy; Precision manufacturing; Geo-science and space science; and Big data science.

Food Innovation Institute. Staff and students at Food Innovation Institute shall undertake applied research on topics identified in consultation with practitioners. The research will be aimed at addressing immediate opportunities and challenges in the food sector. One area of focus will be improving consumer's access to and demand for wholesome foods. Researchers and targeted research users will interact throughout the research process to ensure that the research remains relevant and to increase chances for adoption of research results

University Institutional Development Research. In the period from 2024/2025 to 2028/2029, Soroti University shall focus research on the following areas to support higher education institutional development and management: University governance, administration and leadership models; University community outreach models; Data use in university education system; Education management and education technologies; Financial inclusivity and diversity in contemporary higher education; and University policies.

Crosscutting areas of Research. Cross-cutting areas for research for the period from 2024/2025 to 2028/2029 are those that are nested in any of the above three categories. They are: ICT; Gender; Knowledge unpacking and translation models; and Dryland farming and wealth creation.

Centre for Nuclear Science and Technology. Soroti University in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and Ministry Resources will set up a Centre for Nuclear Science and Technology. The Nuclear Research and Technology Centre shall be responsible for:-

- i. Providing educational opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students interested in advancing the frontiers of nuclear science, nuclear techniques, materials and processes
- ii. Develop applications of nuclear technology for the benefit of society and the environment.
- iii. Prepare students to make contributions to the scientific fundamentals of nuclear science, Operate and maintain nuclear research reactors and other radiation facilities;

- iv. Responsible for the development and engineering of nuclear systems for energy generation, health care, and other applications; and
- v. Responsible for the integration of nuclear systems into society and the natural environment.

Looking Ahead. In the next five years Soroti University's strategic focus shall be in the following areas:-

- i. Widening access (enrolment) to University through promotion, development and mounting of more academic Programmes
- ii. Establish Centres of excellence to support teaching and research in Tropical medicine and energy.
- iii. Creating dynamic Learning Environment that produces competent graduates prepared for an ever-changing digital world
- iv. Become a top tier research and graduate University with vibrant Research culture
- v. Enhance the research productivity and profile of Academic Staff
- vi. Ensuring that the communities in catchment area are transformed
- vii. Creating beneficial collaborative partnerships and Global Presence
- viii. Governance and Management created for mutual benefit of the University and Partners
- ix. Ensuring that the Institution is professionally governed and is responsive to the challenges of 21st century

As part of the above efforts, Soroti University will draw lessons from the experiences of other Universities and initiatives such as Australian Universities (White, 1991), University of Juba (Akec, 2016), Uganda Martyrs University Nkozi (Mukidi *et al.*, 2023), Dr John Garang Memorial University of Science and Technology (Abraham, 2023), and other efforts geared at building science capacity globally and in Africa in particular (Bloom *et al.*, 2006; Shattock, 2010; Akec, 2016; Akec, 2020; Majaliwa, 2020; Nakayiwa *et al.*, 2020; Akec, 2021). Soroti University will also engage with other African Universities through the RUFORUM platform (www.ruforum.org) for lesson learning and collaborative undertaking.

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