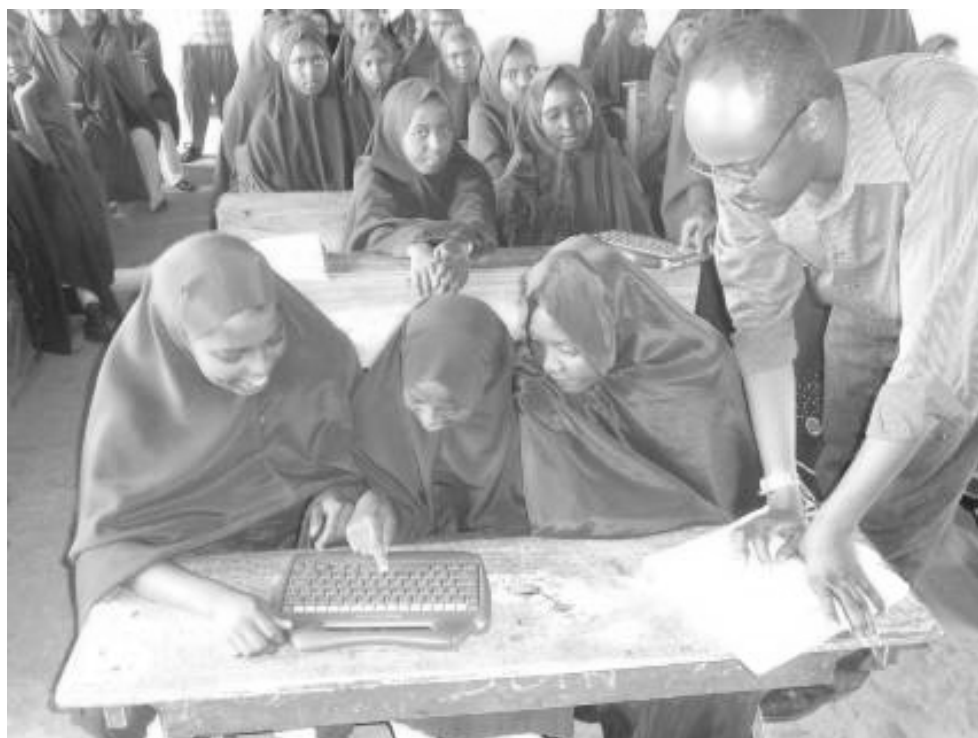


Northern Kenya University Initiative (NORKU)

Establishing an Academic Culture in Northern Kenya



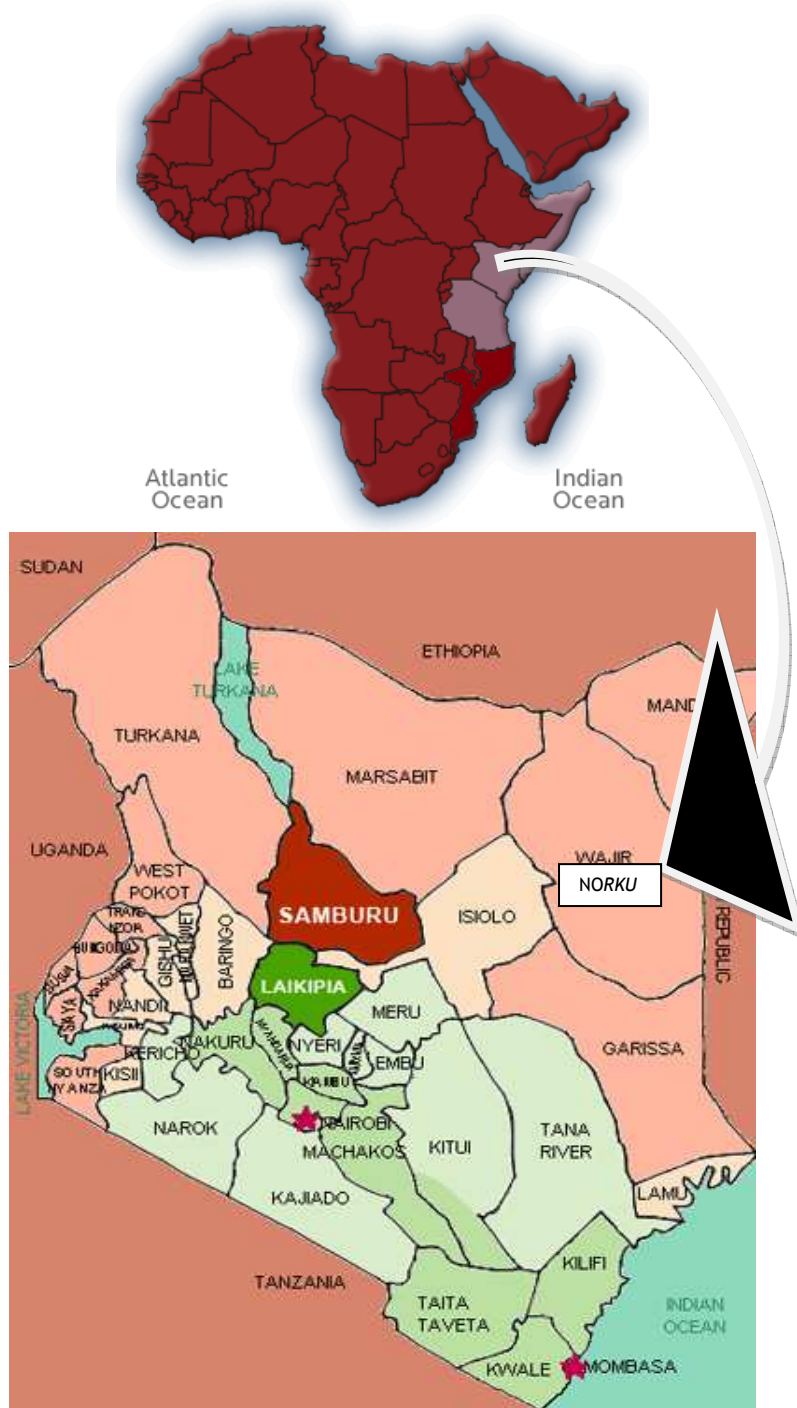
NORKU Initiative sponsored by Generation for Change and Growth





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Northern Kenya University Initiative



NORTHERN KENYA (Arid Region); Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Isiolo, Marsabit, Turkana, Samburu



Introduction

Northern Kenya University Initiative, dubbed the NORKU Initiative, is a strategic initiative to plan, construct and implement a university in Northern Kenya. The initiative is voluntary and extends an invitation to all stakeholders, volunteers, donors, governments and people of goodwill to join this pioneering effort to promote higher learning in Northern Kenya. While the NORKU initiative is sponsored by Generation for Change and Growth (www.thegcg.org), the collective intellectual, physical, professional and monetary support of NORKU/GCG committees, foundations, institutions, communities and local leaders of Northern Kenya and individual volunteers have largely contributed to the ideas and planning of the university initiative.

About GCG

The Generation for Change and Growth was founded in November of 2002 to promote health and educational initiatives in Northern Kenya and other East African regions. GCG promotes Education, Technology and Health Care in regions of East Africa where these basic needs are primarily limited by poverty and disproportionate appropriation of resources.

Northern Kenya and Education

North Eastern Kenya, formerly known as Northern Frontier Districts (NFD), is Kenya's third largest region. Adding Turkana, Isiolo, Marsabit, and Moyale Districts, the area comprises 50% of Kenya's land mass and is referred to as Northern Kenya. It is the poorest region of Kenya, with less population per sq-km and few large cities. Many Kenyans imagine this area as a backward land filled with camels and wild pastoral people. They talk about it in pejorative terms: it is an economic burden, it is unsafe, its people are illiterate, it is devoid of water. This notion is best captured by the statements of American writer, Negley Farson



– “There is one-half of Kenya about which the other half knows nothing and seems to care even less (about)”. The Northern natives know, however, that it is in fact a land of spirited, cultivated people, miracles, latent riches, and untapped resources —both human and natural.

The region is the least developed part of Kenya, with little or no structural, human and other economic and productivity ordinances directed there. Although Kenya as a country has realized significant growth in education, health care and commerce since Independence, the only growth visible in Northern region is in the human population. For decades, the media and local leaders raised concerns about the dire situation in the region, and yet the region remains the lowest priority in the government's development agenda. In fact, in many areas, there is retrograde development: conditions are worse today than they were pre-Independence. Since Kenya's independence in 1963, the northern region has continued to exhibit extensively lower access, quality, participation and achievement in education (Sifuna 2005). This situation is deeply disturbing.

By universal consensus, education is an investment that provides guaranteed results. Education spurs growth and development in a society. Without education, the realization of human capital, which is the recipe for social, political and economic growth, is only remotely possible. Indeed, the United Nations calls education the most important ingredient of well-being and uses it in measuring economic development and quality of life.

The role of education in society can be clearly seen in Kenya, where almost all middle- and high-income earners come from regions with a high education index. The education sector in Northern Kenya has had a long and bumpy history with little to no gains. The contribution of Northern Kenya to the country's productive workforce is negligible, due to lack of educational opportunities. In Northern Kenya, the literacy rate is estimated at 8.5% - compare that to Central province, which has a literacy rate well above 90%. Surprisingly, this spine chilling educational gulf has not awakened the government to take action.



Although there are numerous primary and secondary schools in Northern Kenya, no tertiary educational institution exists. Even within primary and secondary schools, private or public, student performance has consistently been dismal. The poor academic performance has been attributed to environmental hardships, the pastoral and nomadic lifestyle of the communities, and lack of resources, and more-the list is long and varied. That is the dominant theory but not the dominant real reason. The explanation of poor performance in primary and secondary school education in Northern Kenya is deeply embedded in history. True returns and economic rewards of education is often seen after college or university and less often after secondary education. Education has been valueless in contributing to the communities' progress as evidenced by the historical lack of opportunities in college and university. Overtime, this has disillusioned the community and efforts to sustain improved early education have lost momentum leading to less and less interest in better performance. The research below bares this reality.

With doubts cast on economic viability of educational endeavour, many parents may not be convinced that investing in education is worthwhile any longer. This loss of faith on individual return is becoming deterrent. The presence of educated people (High school graduates) who are unemployed reinforces this notion that education is a worthless pursuit. It has therefore become a great risk for parents to sell their livestock in pursuit of education (Ruto, Ongweny & Mugo, 2009).

Northern Kenya has a population of over 4 million. Each year, secondary schools in Northern Kenya graduate over 15,000 students. Kenya's public universities, all located elsewhere, absorb less than 5% of these secondary school graduates (the number who attain good enough grades to be admitted). The rest are left out. A surprising fact, however, is that many Northern Kenyan students who comparatively perform poorly at secondary school have shown stellar achievement in college or university, in some cases surpassing their peers from well resourced secondary schools. This is a fact collectively agreed and cited over and over.



But the fact is that over 90% of all secondary school graduates from Northern Kenya are not fortunate enough to secure a place in college or university in other parts of the country. Instead, the path to their career dreams is permanently sealed, and they join the unemployed masses adding cumulative burden to an already heavily strained and pained society.

Nearly 50 years after Independence, the region still does not have a tertiary educational institution. A university in the area would provide students with a concrete goal and the impetus to strive academically. In this day and age, it is preposterous to imagine any other part of Kenya as vast as the Northern region without an institution of higher learning. And yet somehow, year after year, tertiary education for this region does not feature in the government's agenda.

Over the years, the government in Nairobi has put forth various plans to establish a college or university in Northern Kenya. For instance, in 2003 the government promised boosting the region by construction of a college. The investment program referred to as Expanding Programs to Arid and Semi-Arid lands espoused in 2005 has delivered nothing. In July, 2010, again president Kibaki announced the region will get a University. These plans, however, have remained nothing but empty promises only heard during political campaigns. The only educational program that has achieved a discernible progress in the North is the Primary Schools Infrastructure program funded by the USAID and WHO in 2005/2006. The people and the region of Northern Kenya can only develop and compete in this ever-challenging world through the establishment of its own institution of higher learning.

The NORKU initiative was founded for one purpose only: to address the problem of a lack of tertiary educational opportunities in Northern Kenya by establishing a full-fledged Northern Kenya University in the heart of the region.



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As a result of thorough feasibility studies and extensive consultations performed in 2007/8 by GCG, the organization has determined that NORKU's initial campus will be established at Wajir Town. Wajir, a former colonial provincial headquarter for British-Kenya is strategically placed to host an institution of higher learning. An expansive 50-acre site has been acquired through a collaborative effort between the GCG, the NORKU planning committee, the County Council of Wajir and the regional education Board of Wajir District.

Key to the success of this initiative is partnership with, and funding. The initiative is seeking partnership, sponsorship and support from local and international donors, philanthropic organizations, universities, colleges and governments.

The transcending objective of this initiative is to provide a towering symbol of learning and research that will in the long term contribute to the peace and prosperity not only of Northern Kenya, but also neighboring regions such as Somalia and Ethiopia. That symbol will be NORKU.



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Implementation of NORKU University; An establishment of Academic Culture in Northern Kenya

The first cycle of strategic actions is designed for the development of academic and residential facilities and concurrent design and development of curriculum across all disciplines and degree programs. These programs will reflect our long-term commitment to equipping students for extraordinary lives and building a skill-based society. We anticipate the first phase to take up to 5 years. Strategic initiatives for the first phase are described below:

- Year 1-2:
Acquisition of land, concept and architectural planning, fundraising, committee establishment certifications and licensing requirements
- Years 1- 3:
Systemic development of academic facilities (lecture rooms/theaters, offices, etc.) and residential buildings (hostels)
- Years 3-5:
 1. Design and development of curriculum across all disciplines and degree programs – Diplomas, Bachelor, Certificates etc.
 2. Upgrades and finishes of ongoing facilities development.
 3. Establishment and recruitment of teaching and support staff.
- Years 5 and beyond:
 1. Establish admissions department, academic deans, enrollment and marketing staff, and ad hoc outside professionals
 2. Reorganize the University into three main educational operating units, the Undergraduate College-the Graduate College-and the Advanced Placement Academy
 3. Establish the Graduate Program Council. The council of scholars identifies, proposes and develops graduate programs, meeting demands for graduate-level education in specific disciplines and societal needs in the coming years.
 4. Appointment of Council of Scholars. The NORKU Council of Scholars will ultimately comprise up to 6 scholars with endowed chairs (rotating or reappointed on a five-year term).



These and regionally acclaimed educational and intellectual leaders will hold the most prestigious and active positions in the University's faculty. The endowed chairs will not be permanently appointed in order to enable all faculty members the opportunity to aspire to and achieve appointment to a chair if an individual's leadership and scholarship reach the appropriate level. Each Scholar will be responsible for the design and development of a collaborative research and learning program within a selected department of Learning in which she/he is a recognized leader. An endowed fund will support all such programs, including start-up fund for a program, research and professional development support for its leading NORKU Scholar and collaborative faculty scholars, and, in the long-term NORKU Student Scholars who will also be supported by endowed scholarships.

- The departments listed below are included to illustrate the types of programs that could exist as part of the short and long-term planning and are not meant to exclude other studies that could result from faculty-student-donor discussions and interest.
 - Natural & Health Sciences
 - Women's Leadership in Business, Finance and Commerce
 - Engineering Science
 - Education throughout Life
 - Art and Humanities
 - Language and Communications
 - International Studies, Public Policy and Global Understanding
 - Financial, Scientific, Economic, and Technological Literacy

 - As we continue into years 6 through 15, numerous other strategies will be implemented and designed to achieve our long-term goal: By 2025, NORKU University will be a nationally recognized, regional leader in higher education. The specific strategies for the implementation of our long-term plan will be included in the document "NORKU 2025: Strategic Action Plan."