

Strathmore programme follows same curriculum as many universities abroad, and the standard is just as high

# Chance to buck MBA trend at African institution

Sue Blaine

THE Master of Business Administration (MBA) that Kenyan doctor Majid Twahir, a specialist in kidney disease, is to complete at the end of this year has completely changed the course of his career.

Twahir's partner at Nairobi's Aga Khan University Hospital was so unsettled by the changes he implemented because of what he learned at the Nairobi's Strathmore Business School he brought Twahir out.

"We didn't have a mission, a vision, for the next five to 10 years, and I wanted that. He said he could not think beyond a year," says Twahir.

That Twahir chose to do his MBA in Africa bucks a general trend for Africans to do this type of education at universities overseas, but Twahir says he carefully researched MBAs and found that the Strathmore programme — the business school is partnered with the University of Navarra's IESE Business School in Barcelona, Spain — followed the same curriculum as many universities abroad, and that the standard was just as high.

Studying in Nairobi meant he did not have to leave his family, or his practice, although, ironically, he may now leave the practice in favour of opening up another one that focuses on prevention instead of managing kidney disease when it is well-nigh terminal.

"Nephrology in Kenya is very, very expensive ... most of our patients are treated like terminal cancer patients (because they wait a long time to seek treatment, only reaching out when they have reached a state near death). I want to change it and prevent that," he says.

Strathmore Business School was opened by Strathmore University's former accounting

dean, George Njenga, in September 2005, and Njenga credits the Association of African Business Schools (AABS) — also launched in 2005 — with setting the business school on its feet.

The AABS is the brainchild of retired International Finance Corporation Global Business School Network director Guy Pfefferman, who argues that strengthening African management schools will increase the continent's ability to use foreign aid money properly. "Well-meaning people who advocate hugely increased amounts of aid funding (to African countries) as a solution to the poor countries' problems often neglect the often severe limitations of absorptive capacity. Like water, excessive funding runs off in the form of capital flight to foreign bank accounts and generally in unnecessary waste," says Pfefferman.

In 2005, former British prime minister Tony Blair submitted to the Gleneagles Group of Eight summit a report on Africa that flagged management weakness in every sector of African economies.

The obvious answer is to train more Africans in proper management, but Pfefferman argues that sending African students to foreign management schools all too often results in a brain drain because the students take jobs abroad.

The 17-member AABS was launched to support the continent's graduate business schools and its flagship programme is one called Teaching the Practice of Management (TPM).

Fatima Hamdulay, an engineer who became so interested in the process of transforming the Cape Town company for which she worked that she did an MBA at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of



Nairobi's Strathmore Business School has graduated almost 70 MBAs, mainly from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, from a 'base of zero in 2005'. It has 35 lecturers and over 30 written up case studies.

Business (GSB), did the TPM course after joining the school as a lecturer.

"You teach in the way you were taught, and for some that's a very undergraduate style, very directive. At a business school you need to be more facilitative. You are dealing with adults with business experience. I did my MBA at UCT and my method was probably very similar to that of the lecturer I got the most out of, but I also got pointers on how productive you are in class ... how to use the floor space ... You can get locked into one vision of a good teacher, but (the course shows you) there are

many good teachers who use the same method, but have different styles. Also, we could exchange ideas and talk," says Hamdulay, who joined the GSB's permanent staff last year.

Some of the lecturers Hamdulay met while on the course in Kenya had never been taught using the modern participatory methods, which rest heavily on case studies, says Jonathan Cook, AABS board member and TPM director.

"Case studies help the class deal with actual decision points. It's not just a theoretical story, the teaching happens where the insight emerges about how you

make decisions," he says.

Case studies help business school lecturers increase class participation, cover a number of industries quickly and they give students a practical tool for analysing and making decisions, says Cook.

When Njenga established Strathmore Business School, he ran up against a perennial problem for African universities — getting a good number of credible faculty members.

"We realised several things — our (African business schools') research capabilities were low, our teaching capacity was low and so was our quality assur-

ance. We didn't have executive training in business schools in sub-Saharan Africa (except SA), and where we did have them they were too theoretical to be attractive to businessmen, with the exception of Lagos Business School," he says.

One of the first things Njenga did was to send staff on the TPM course, but he also took advantage of another AABS project — he went on a deans' tour of European and US business schools to ensure Strathmore's standard was international.

This insistence on international standards means that Njenga has to pay staff higher salaries in order to lure them to the business school and keep them there. This means higher fees and this really worried the Nairobi university management team he had to persuade to give the green light to the business school. "They thought no one would pay those fees. They have changed their view," he says.

Strathmore has graduated almost 70 MBAs, mainly from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, has 35 lecturers and more than 30 case studies have been written, from a "base of zero in 2005". The case studies are not only used across Africa, they have popped up in European business school classrooms.

The business school is to turn the sod on new facilities next month.

The buildings will be the physical realisation of Njenga's dream, but they are important on another level — they will be part of Strathmore's path to achieving accreditation from one of the international bodies that quality-assure business schools from London to Lagos.

Njenga says the fact that he can even contemplate this has a lot to do with the AABS.

"The AABS requires you to have standards that will get you there."

