

Late Prof. Wasawo: Pioneer scholar with impeccable accolades

The world woke up to a rude shock early Tuesday morning with the news of the death of a founding academic icon Prof. David Peter Simon Wasawo who died at the Aga Khan Hospital on February 4, 2014 at the age of 91.

The late Wasawo, was a pioneer African Zoologist in East Africa who taught at Makerere University in the 1950s and 1960s and at the University of Nairobi in the 1960s and early 1970s before joining International bodies that included UN agencies, Tanzania Scientific Research Council, and OAU panels and countries.

Prof. Wasawo served as Vice-Principal of the University of Nairobi College between 1965 and 1970. He also served as the pioneer Chairman, Department of Zoology and Dean, Faculty of Science. He resigned from the University in 1973 to serve on International bodies.

Prof. Francis Gichaga, a former Vice-Chancellor, describes him as “a humble man you could not easily tell that he was so educated”.

For his excellent service to the University and the world, his impeccable academic credentials, his enormous contribution to research and teaching in Science, his outstanding role in the application of Science and technology for development, and above all unsurpassed humility, the University of Nairobi awarded him the Degree of Doctor of Science (*Honoris Causa*).

From where I sit, I know that the University benefited greatly from Prof. Wasawo’s leadership as Chairman of Council between 1998 and 2005 – a critical period when the University implemented module II programmes and pioneered the competitive hiring of top managers in the University. This practice has since been emulated by other state bodies.

As an academician Prof. Wasawo was without parallel a fact acknowledged by Margaret McPherson in her book “*They Built for the Future, A chronicle of Makerere University College 1922-1962*”. She wrote, “Tutors had the joy of reporting an outstanding student in Biology, D.P.S Wasawo who is now the Vice-Principal and Professor of Zoology, having been sent straight to Oxford University from Makerere.

As an outstanding local zoologist, he researched extensively on various biological species in East Africa and published many scientific papers. He will always be remembered for his original contribution to the study of the lungfish (*Protopterus aethiopicus*) the largest fish in the lake region before the introduction of the Nile Perch in Lake Victoria.

His contemporaries in Makerere included eminent scholars among them the late Prof. Simeon Ominde, Prof. Joseph Lule, Prof. Wilbert Chagule and Prof. Y.M. Bora. His former students remember him for his powerful intellect; he could conduct a three-hour lecture without

referring to his notes. Among his students were the late Prof. Hillary Ojiambo, late Prof. Joseph Maina Mungai, Prof. Richard Musangi, late Prof. George Kinoti, Prof. Canute Khamala, late Prof. Nimrod Bwibo, Prof. J. K. Mati and the late Prof. Ambrose Wasuna. This cohort of scholars played a critical role in the expansion of university education in the country and to a large extent were the founding scholars of their respective disciplines in the country.

A true scholar, Prof. Wasawo's contributions were felt beyond our borders. In Tanzania, when serving as UNESCO's scientific advisor, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Tanzania Scientific Research Council. Again, while serving as the Chief National Resources Division, of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) based in Addis Ababa, he was instrumental in the establishment of the regional centre for services in Surveying, Mapping and Remote Sensing. Further, Wasawo was the post apartheid Director of Training at the African Institute of Policy Analysis & Economic Integration in Cape Town, South Africa. As a true scholar, he documented his experiences in a report which he presented to the late President Nelson Mandela's government, as the way forward to cooperation in Science and Technology for development.

His best contribution to the field of academia and leadership in learning institutions is best captured by the following comments:

1. A humble man you could not easily tell that he was so educated. Prof. Francis J. Gichaga
2. We shall miss your guidance and leadership for you served the University with dedication. Prof. Gitahi Kiama
3. You are a good pioneer, you took the lead. Prof. Charles Okidi
4. You pioneered the essence of administration in the University. Prof. Bernard Sihanya.

As we celebrate the life of this incredible man, whose symbol was simplicity and humility, despite his remarkable achievements, his valuable services rendered to Society will remain etched in the annals of history. Fare thee well Prof. David Peter Simon Wasawo.

Tribute by Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi

Prof. George Magoha