

Building the right environment: New hostels at the Islamic University in Uganda



Islamic Development Bank Group

The Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) has been a success story since it opened in 1988. As only the second university in the country, it played a pivotal role in the early days of Uganda's higher education sector. And, from the start, many students – from Uganda and beyond – chose to study here.

However, these rising numbers soon presented a challenge: the lack of accommodation of a sufficiently high standard. This was required for students coming from distant parts of Uganda, and especially those from other countries. The university has a long-term target to achieve a 50:50 split between national and international students, part of its mandate from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, which founded IUIU. Providing better accommodation would support efforts

to increase the number of international students, who need somewhere to stay when living overseas.

To solve the problem, IUIU approached the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) for financing to construct two large hostels, one for female students and one for male students, at its main campus in Mbale. Now completed, these form the epicentre of campus life and have enhanced IUIU's reputation worldwide.

The hostel for female students.



A better place to live and study

Support for education is one of IsDB's major focus areas, so when IUIU asked for help in 2004, work began soon afterwards. The final project cost was US\$6.72 million, of which IsDB provided US\$6.6 million and IUIU the rest.

“The hostels gave IUIU a facelift; students are proud to study here and parents are proud to send them here”

– Mr Ratib Juma, Security Officer, IUIU Mbale campus

The two hostels, which were completed in 2011, came at just the right time. The existing accommodation at the Mbale campus was cramped, poorly lit and had limited facilities (for example, not enough showers or washrooms). By contrast, the hostels financed by IsDB are an example of first-class student accommodation.

Deiho Mohamud Ali (left) and Nadifo Aderi Abdi relax in their room in the hostel for female students.

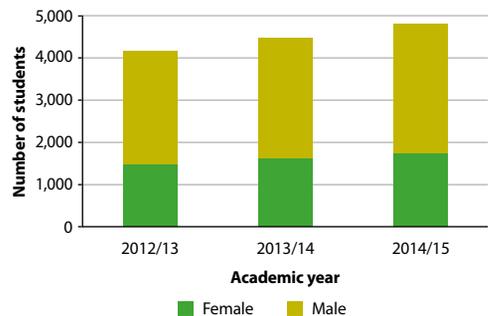


The overall design allows more natural daylight into the corridors and courtyards, compared with the older hostels. The rooms themselves are much bigger, allowing more space for reading desks and chairs, and have dividing walls to provide some privacy. This creates a much more suitable environment for studying and reading. Other improvements provided by the project include:

- ◆ more facilities in each block, including toilets, washrooms, kitchens and a common room for social events
- ◆ safety equipment, including fire hoses throughout
- ◆ a water tank and generator on campus to supply 24-hour electricity and water
- ◆ sports equipment for each hostel.

The hostels, built to house 550 students each, are clearly an attraction for students applying to IUIU. This is demonstrated by the steady rise in students at the Mbale campus since they opened (see Figure 1). In fact, the only brake on further growth is that the hostels can no longer meet the increasing demand for places (see page 7).

Figure 1. Student numbers at Mbale campus



A boost for the campus

The facilities available in the new buildings benefit all the students on campus, not just those in residence. For example, everyone can attend the society meetings and social events held in the common rooms, or use the range of shops and services that have sprung up nearby. "The recreational facilities give them a space to relax and socialize, and a chance to learn from each other," says Mrs Okot Zaitun, the warden of the hostel for female students.

The high quality of the buildings and the rich social and academic life on campus are well-known in Uganda and across Africa. This all adds to the prestige of studying at IUIU. "The facilities make them proud; they feel 'at university' and are more inclined to work hard to justify the privilege they have," says Mrs Zaitun. "They are learning to be adults as well as students."



Mrs Okot Zaitun.

Islamic education for all

As one of few Islamic higher education institutions in Uganda, IUIU plays a central role in promoting Islamic values. "We instill Islamic beliefs in all our students," explains Imam Gakowe Hassan, the warden of the hostel for male students. "For example, Islam offers solutions to all of life's problems. We equip our students with the knowledge to deal with these."

Around 30 per cent of the students are not Muslims, but they also take the 'Introduction to Islam' course to increase their appreciation of the religion. When they graduate, they take this knowledge out into society. This is important: a lot of people in Uganda have a narrow understanding of Islam, but IUIU's graduates can help to increase people's awareness of what it is really about.



One of the many extracurricular activities on campus is the '93.1 IUIU FM' radio station. Broadcast across Uganda's Eastern Region, this gives Mass Communications students a chance to gain practical experience in media skills. Brian Wandekha, 24, a third-year student from Mbale (pictured), presents a call-in show that covers subjects such as 'Women's issues', 'Family issues in Islam' and 'Intercultural affairs'. He is not a Muslim, but having studied at IUIU he has a much better understanding of Islam.

**"These buildings ...
accelerated
our development"**

– Professor Ismail Gyagenda, Vice Rector of Academic Affairs, IUIU

Safe, comfortable and affordable

Good accommodation is especially important for international students. Before leaving home, it is reassuring to know that there is a safe, comfortable place to stay – both for the student and their parents. In this respect, the hostels are helping IUIU towards its target of 50 per cent of students coming from outside Uganda. The number of countries represented is also rising. In 2004, only 13 countries were represented, but this has grown since, reaching a peak of 23 different countries in 2013.

One of these is Ms Hussein Hindu Abdul-Majid, 22, a Bachelor of Law student from Kenya who stays in the hostel for female students. IUIU has a strong reputation for adhering to Islamic principles while delivering a high standard of education. This was a major factor in her decision to apply here, she says, as it is something not widely available at other universities. For example, the hostel for female students observes Sharia: all the workers are female and males cannot enter without express permission.

She also enjoys the high standard of services available. “The hostels have so many advantages,”

she says. “Constant power is one; while other parts of Mbale have power cuts, our studies are not interrupted thanks to the generator.” Security is another factor, as the hostels are a safe place to live and study. “Otherwise I would have stayed in Kenya,” she states.

Local students also enjoy the vibrant academic and social life on campus that the hostels have helped to create. Andrew Musinkul, 24, is from Uganda and studying for a Bachelors degree in Procurement and Logistics Management. “With such an international mix, it’s a chance to learn about other cultures: learning how to cook new dishes, for example, or learning new languages,” he says. And this doesn’t just come from the international students: “With 65 different tribes in Uganda, we can find out about other parts of our country.”

Considering the standard of facilities, the costs to residents are reasonable. Students pay 280,000–375,000 Ugandan shillings (US\$84–112) per semester (four months). This is affordable, even for students from the poorest backgrounds.

The courtyard in the hostel for male students.



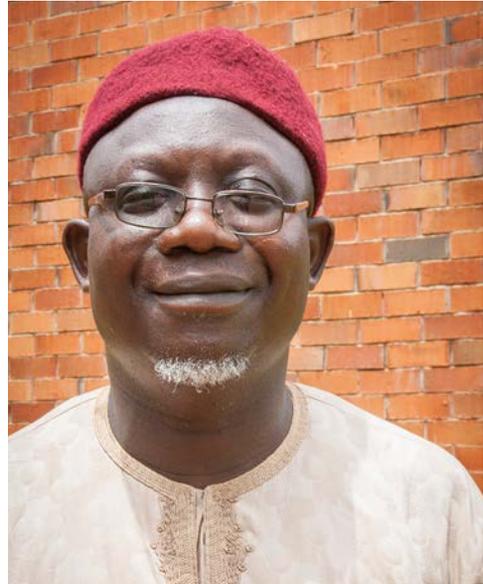
Opening the floodgates to international students

While students stay on campus for just three to four years, Mr Abubakar Ndagi, a lecturer in Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education, has taught at IUIU since 2001 and seen first hand the changes brought by the project.

“The two new hostels excited the whole university,” he recalls. “Previously we didn’t have many impressive buildings, but these changed the whole landscape – not just of IUIU, but of Mbale as well. They can be seen on the major route north to South Sudan – people notice us as they pass.”

It’s not just passers-by who are impressed. The hostels have enhanced IUIU’s international reputation, including in his home country of Nigeria. “It opened the floodgates for overseas students,” he says. “The hostels are a major motivation for parents in Nigeria to send their children here – we recognize the quality.”

While the students are the project’s main beneficiaries, the staff at IUIU also welcomed the



Mr Ndagi.

improved facilities. “The hostels have boosted academic life on campus. For example, we use the large dining halls for conferences, while both staff and students can use them for social events,” explains Mr Ndagi. “We even use them as classrooms at times.”

The hostels by numbers...

US\$6.6 million – IsDB’s contribution to the project

1,100 – places available in the two new hostels, **550** in each

24 – hours a day that electricity and water are available, thanks to the water tank and generator installed during the project

25 – percentage of overseas students at IUIU in 2015/16 (towards a target of 50 per cent)

23 – different nationalities represented among the students at the Mbale campus in 2013

Benefitting a town ...

The hostels have not just benefitted IUIU; Mbale has prospered as well. Since the university opened its first campus here in 1988, several new businesses have established along the road from the centre of town. More recently, a number of enterprises have started up on campus: everything from fruit sellers to shoe repair stands and restaurants.

One of these is Benghazi Stationers, which provides typing, copying and printing services. In 2013, they opened a small shop in a prime location between the two hostels. "This is a good place to have a business," says Mr Higeny Abdallah, who works in the shop. "Although trade is seasonal [they close during the university holidays], we do a lot of business with staff and students."

Being on campus also means they benefit from the 24-hour electricity provided by the generator – essential for a business that needs power for its printing and copying machines. And while they

pay a license of 100,000 shillings a year (around US\$30) to be on IUIU's grounds, the average turnover per month is 300,000–400,000 shillings (US\$90–120), making it a highly profitable place to run a business.

... and a country

Beyond Mbale, IUIU's success is being felt across Ugandan society and beyond. Nearly 20,000 students have so far graduated, going on to contribute in many walks of life. Some have reached a high level in the police service; others are Members of Parliaments and diplomats, in Uganda and elsewhere; and several have gone on to gain PhDs and become lecturers.

While not all graduates stayed in the hostels, there is little doubt that they were the catalyst for IUIU's growth and continued high standards. "The hostels boosted IUIU, and in turn IUIU has boosted Uganda," says Dr Ahmad Kawesa Sengendo, the Rector at IUIU.

Benghazi Stationers.



Building on the success

“The hostels had a trigger effect on the whole of IUIU,” states Dr Sengendo. “They allowed for our growth, and the increase in student numbers increased our income.” Around 91 per cent of this comes from student fees. The growth in student numbers has enabled IUIU to keep up to date with its repayments for the project.

Strong revenues have also enabled IUIU to continue growing. It has recently agreed further financing with IsDB for a commercial project in Kampala, and it has 200 acres of land for expanding the campus in Mbale. This will be used for a new administration building, a second mosque and a hall for conferences and larger gatherings. They will also build a much larger library.

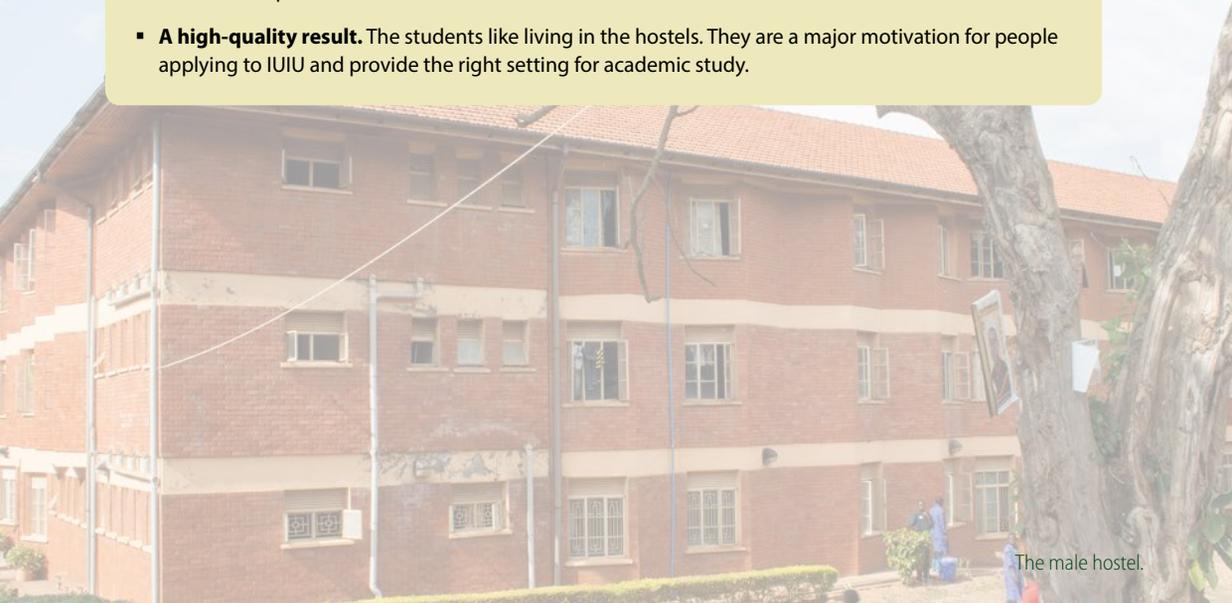
But despite the resounding success of the project, there remains one major issue: the

demand for places has continued to rise, outstripping the spaces available. Each hostel was built for 550 students, but in 2016 they hold 730 (male) and 790 (female) students, with up to six people sleeping in rooms designed for four. “The two hostels solved our problem at that time by increasing our capacity, especially for overseas students,” says Dr Sengendo. “But as well as solving a problem, they also created one: now we have opened up, so many more want to come.”

To resolve this, IUIU is building more accommodation. These will follow the same design as the IsDB hostels, given their popularity among the current and previous residents. As well as looking for funding, IUIU is negotiating with private-sector companies to see if they can construct and operate the hostels commercially. The land is secured and progress is expected in the coming months.

Success factors

- **Demand.** IUIU needed more accommodation to house the growing number of students wanting to study here. The hostels were swiftly used to full capacity, relieving a huge burden at the time.
- **Timely funding.** IsDB provided the funding very promptly, meaning the hostels could be completed in 75 months. By contrast, other hostel projects that were started earlier are not yet complete, due to the lack of funds.
- **Support from IsDB.** IUIU had support and guidance from IsDB throughout, for example in how to follow IsDB’s processes.
- **A high-quality result.** The students like living in the hostels. They are a major motivation for people applying to IUIU and provide the right setting for academic study.



The male hostel.

Lessons learnt

Overall, the project went very smoothly. This was largely because of the understanding shown by IsDB regarding the realities of such projects in Uganda. For example, IUIU could not source all the materials it needed locally. To resolve this, IsDB was flexible and encouraged procurement contracts with international companies. Without this flexibility, the project would not have been so successful.

However, there are a few small design issues that should be considered for future hostels, at IUIU and elsewhere. For example, the wardens have no office space in the hostels, meaning they have to work elsewhere – they would prefer to be close to their students. Another improvement would be a separate mosque for females in their hostel. They have converted a common room into a mosque, but a designated space would be better.

There have also been requests from postgraduate students for separate hostels. This would give them a quieter space for their studies, as they have to undertake more research than undergraduates. These are minor issues, however, and easily rectified; overall, the hostels provide the blueprint for accommodation fit for 21st century students.

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