

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT FOR INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION IN AFRICA.

Speech given by Prof. David Abdulai as the invited Chief Guest Speaker at the Launching of the Management University of Africa (MUA), Nairobi, Kenya.

The Chancellor, Dr. Reuben Mutiso, the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Jude Mathooko, Chairman of the University Council, Engineer Michael Kamau, Executive Director of KIM and MUA Council Member, Mr. David Muturi, Director of Institutional Development, Ms. Leah Munyao, Distinguished guest, Ladies and gentlemen. All protocols observed.

It is with exceeding joy that I stand before you today and it is indeed a great honour to be invited to address this 3rd International Conference on Industry and Higher Education.

Let me first start by expressing my sincere gratitude to Mr. David Muturi, the Executive Director of KIM, the Board of Directors of KIM, and the new Management University of Africa and all those who made this conference possible for giving me this opportunity to address you. Thank you for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded me. To all the team at KIM and all who worked in diverse ways to make this conference possible I say *Asante*.

For me personally, it is a great pleasure and an honour to be back in this great country of yours, a country of great beauty and honourable people. One cannot also forget that your

country was one of those involved in the early struggle for the total liberation of Africa from the yoke of colonial rule. May the good Lord continue to bless your beautiful land and its' wonderful people.

Mr. Chairman:

I am tasked to talk about *how higher institutions of learning in Africa can foster leadership development and the management of knowledge for industrial innovation on the continent.*

I will like to start by saying that, our continent has come a long way but still has long way to go. Africa has come a long way from the time when it was regarded by Afro-pessimist as a poor continent with precarious states and beggarly peoples that arouse pity. Other Afro-pessimist like V. S. Naipaul writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, claim that “Africa has no future.” Lester Thurow an economist at MIT and a former Dean of the Sloan School of Management in his book *Creating Wealth* describe Africa as an “Economic Desert.” *The Economist* magazine in its May 13-19 2000 edition, labelled Africa as “The Hopeless Continent.”

Others like Hugh Trevor-Roper, a British historian and a former Regis Professor at Oxford University, claimed that “*Africa has no history.*” He said and I quote, “*what is known as African history was only a tale of barbarous tribal gyrations.*”

Mr. Chairman:

Which Africa are these Afro-pessimists talking about? Indeed does Africa really have no history? Is Africa an economic desert? Is our beloved continent a “Hopeless Continent?” No, the Africa these people are writing about is the “Make Believe Africa.” The Africa I often refer to as the “**CNN Africa**,” the “**National Geographic Africa**,” or the “**Hollywood Africa**.”

Let me tell these Afro-pessimists of the Africa that I know and grew up in and still live in. Our continent is one with incredible history. It is the home of the first man, the home of ancient kingdoms like the Ghana, Songhai and Mali kingdoms, the home of great civilisations like the Nile Valley civilisations, the Kingdoms of Nubia and Ethiopia, Kanem-Bornu, the Oyo empire, the Kingdom of Dahomey, the Rift Valley Kingdoms, the Asante Kingdom and those of the Great Zimbabwe to mention just a few.

Mr. Chairman:

I stand here today to say that those Afro-pessimists indeed those naysayers of a “**futureless Africa**” are eating their words. The African dawn is here and those who see it as impossible are advised to consult history and to remember Galileo Galilei, the Italian astronomer, when he dared to say, “*Eppur Si mouve,*” –

the earth revolves around the sun. Many were those who said it was impossible. At that dawn of change, Galileo was called a lunatic. It turned out that indeed the earth revolves around the sun after all.

At this new dawn, as African countries and their leadership take a firm grip of their economies, and as the “winds of Democratisation and change” are sweeping through our continent, we are challenged to confound the naysayers and Afro-pessimist that this is a new Africa, an Africa different from the one they depict as nightmarish, chaotic and one in which nothing works. That “Africa” belongs to the dustbin of history. Ladies and gentlemen, today, our continent is at the threshold of a new renaissance.

Yet there are those who refuse to accept this fact. These are those who subscribe to what I call the “Dead Man Creek’s Syndrome” --- that is those who believe that the African Renaissance is “a pipe-dream.” Former President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa once gave a story about a town in Mississippi in the Deep South of the United States of America called “Dead Man’s Creek.” It is a story I will like to repeat here today to drive home the point. According to former President Mbeki, in “Dead Man’s Creek,” every evening at 9pm, after the inhabitants have watched the many images of wars, starvation, malnutrition, refugees, corruption and other African horrors on their TV screens, the residents of “Dead Man’s Creek,” find it

very difficult to reconcile such images with the vision of a renascent Africa.

They therefore concluded amid much laughter that Africans like you and I and our leaders who speak of an African Renaissance or that the 21st Century is Africa's must either be great comedians or have a good sense of humour. Well, guess who is having the last laugh today? We Africans.

Today Africa is seen as “a land of opportunity,” and referred to in certain quarters as “the last frontier.” Mckinsey Global Institute in its June 2010 publication titled, “*Lions on the move: The progress and potential of African economies,*” stated that “by the year 2020, Africa's collective GDP will be \$2.6 trillion; its consumer spending will be \$1.4 trillion; and the number of African households with discretionary income will be 128 million. It states that by the year 2040, 1.1 billion Africans will be of working age and 50 percent of Africans will be living in cities by the year 2030.”

It further states, “Africa's economies are on the move. The continent's GDP rose by 4.9 percent a year from 2000 through 2008, more than twice its pace in the 1980s and '90s. Today, Africa ranks among the fastest-growing economic regions in the world. It is home to 20 domestic companies with revenues of at least \$3 billion each and 52 cities with over 1 million people – more than double the number in 1990 and the same number as in Western Europe.” **Ladies and Gentlemen, this**

is the Africa I was born and live in; not the “make-believe Africa” created by the Afro-pessimists.

Mr. Chairman:

Here are some more facts about the Africa that they claim has no future:

- Fact: Africa’s growth has surpassed all the OECD countries for the last five years.
- Fact: Returns on investment in Africa surpasses all the regions in the world.
- Fact: China’s trade with Africa has surpassed the \$100 billion mark.
- The Africa of today is seeing increased democratisation on the continent.

I hold the firm believe that the 21st Century is Africa’s century. Our story is compelling and we are the only ones who must tell it. Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian novelist once said, that “*Nobody however well-intentioned or informed can tell our story better that we can.*” Much as we need to tell the story of Africa’s current growth trajectory, we also need to make sure that such growth sustain. This will not happen by we Africans just “wishing on a star.” It will need a new mind-set of our leadership and indeed of all us; of a new “can-do” attitude and above all, the

commitment to move our respective economies from the Production–economy (P-economy) to the Knowledge-economy (K-economy). It will also require our higher institutions of learning on our continent to play their role.

But what is the Knowledge-economy or K-economy? One may ask. It is an economy based mostly on the generation, distribution and effective utilisation of knowledge. In such an economy, knowledge is the primary engine for growth and the creation of wealth, not land, labour and capital as most people will think.

What are the characteristics of the K-economy? First, it must be made clear that these characteristics can be seen in the increasing role of knowledge as a factor of production.

- The K-economy is race, gender or religion neutral
- K-industries can be located anywhere
- Knowledge enhanced products can command higher prices
- Human capital competencies are important in the K-economy
- ICT are important levers in the K-economy

The call for African countries to move to the K-economy requires visionary leadership. African leaders that can *“see with their eyes closed. Leaders that can see the big picture, anticipate trends and the requisite opportunities these trends present. They must also be*

leaders with a “can do” attitude with the guts to act on the glorious dreams they have for their respective people, our continent and for posterity.”

Mr. Chairman

The role Africa’s Higher Educational Institutions of learning have to play in the development of such leadership cannot be emphasised enough. For without the right kind of leadership innovation and industrial development would be pipe dreams. But these institutions cannot do that unless they shed their colonial and post-colonial blinkers. Most of Africa’s institutions of Higher learning were set up right after independence from colonial rule as well as during the early post-colonial period. Most of these institutions are still stuck in the past, using old pedagogy and methods, as well as dated modes of knowledge dissemination of those by-gone periods to educate our people. The Africa of today and tomorrow and indeed our globalized world of today are different from those bygone years.

To able to develop leaders in Africa that will lead the knowledge revolution in Africa, ushering in an innovation wave for the continent’s growth and development; Africa’s Higher Educational Institutions must first decolonize their pedagogy and curriculum, replacing them with an African Centred pedagogy—that puts Africa’s development challenges at the centre of its discuss. Indeed, if Africa is going to win

tomorrow's battles, it cannot do so by using yesterday's weapons.

African Institutions of Higher Learning must also develop the requisite infrastructure and infostructure that will enhance the delivery of this new curriculum using a new pedagogy that is learner centred and driven. It must also use African case studies that deal with issues that pertain to the African condition in its delivery.

Furthermore, African Institutions of Higher learning must develop leaders that care about Africa and its peoples. These leaders must be ethical, have integrity, are courageous, as well as visionaries, who are committed individuals with humility and empathy, yet having confidence in themselves. They must be leaders that understand that *“success in life does not come from holding a good hand, but playing a poor hand well.”* Indeed, a “can— do” attitude and the passion to make a difference.

Mr. Chairman:

It is not enough for African Institutions of Higher Learning to develop leaders. It is imperative that they develop the right kind of leaders—leaders with integrity. But who is a leader with integrity? According to Karl Eller, an American author and entrepreneur, such a person is, *“a together person, who doesn't fold in a crunch, doesn't lie, cheat, flatter, doesn't fake credentials or keep two sets of books. He doesn't blame others for his mistakes or steal credit for their work. He never goes back on a deal, and their*

handshake matches the tightest contract drawn by the fanciest law firm in town.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I will contend that most of our challenges in Africa are due to the fact that we lack leaders with integrity. Leaders in Africa with integrity are few and far in between. Rather, what we find in most of the leadership on the continent today is the mind-set of it is “*our time to eat*” or “*what is in it for me*” attitude. This kind of leadership cannot bring about innovation and industrial growth on our continent.

Thus, African Institutions of Higher Learning must develop leaders who have vision. By vision, I do not mean leaders with eyes. I am talking about leaders who can see with their eyes closed. Helen Keller, American author, who was also deaf and blind, once said that, “*it is a terrible thing to see and have no vision.*” A visionary leader is “one who knows where he is going and can make the road that leads there.” It is then easy to be able to take his or her people with them on that journey.

Mr. Chairman:

Higher Institutions of Learning in African can and must play an important role in knowledge generation, knowledge management, its commercialisation and dissemination to aid Africa in its growth and development efforts. It is only through knowledge generation and its effective management that will help Africa unleash its innovative prowess. But how are they going to do this? I have already talked about their role in

developing the requisite leadership. I have also earlier mentioned, the need for them to decolonize the curriculum but most important of all, for the academics and administrators of these institutions to decolonize their minds. **They need to unshackle their minds that are shackled by the Psychological Chains of Mental Slavery induced by our colonial and post-colonial experience.** For those who have been to Western countries for further studies and have returned, they need to remove the Western bias they might have “unwittingly” acquired as they are mostly inapplicable in the African situation.

Furthermore, they need to retrofit themselves with critical, analytical and clear-viewing lenses to see through the fog of global realpolitik known today as globalisation or research to create and manage what we Africans know. For example, most of the patents and intellectual property rights of African Knowledge Systems and traditional medicine and methods of healing are owned by non-Africans. These are given new and “nice” sounding names in the global marketplace. In fact, I am even told they are trying to patent some African blood types.

Hence African Institutions of Higher Learning must invest and engage in serious research to create knowledge products and processes necessary for industrial development and the continuous innovation of these industries. But these institutions must also play an important role in the protection and commercialisation and disseminate of this knowledge. We must

undertake research to inform policy in our respective countries to pass the requisite Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) laws to protect our knowledge systems, traditional medicines and methods of healing and patents. African Institutions of Higher Learning should also endeavour to collaborate with each other in knowledge sharing and the cross-fertilisation of ideas for industrial innovation. They must also collaborate with industry to be able to commercialise their research findings as well as contribute to enhance the process of industry to bring about innovative ways of production.

Mr. Chairman:

Unfortunately such has not been the case. Cassius once said to Brutus in William Shakespeare's, Julius Caesar that, "The fault my dear Brutus is not in our stars but in ourselves, that we are underlings." Ladies and gentlemen, our problem in Africa today as it pertains to employing innovation for our industrial development is not in the stars but in ourselves. Each and every one of us here belongs to or are products of Higher Institutions of Learning in Africa. What have we done to change this picture? We complain all the time about lack of resources, but we are advised to heed the call of Booker T. Washington when he said, "*Start where you are with what you have, knowing that what you have is plenty enough.*"

Mr. Chairman:

When all is said and done, we Africans and our Institutions of Higher Learning are the only ones who can develop the requisite leadership, undertake the necessary research to develop the new knowledge that will move our economies from the P-Economy to the K-Economy to unleash our innovative prowess for industrial growth.

Ladies and gentlemen, unleashing our innovative prowess for our industrial growth and development will be pipe-dreams if we according to American author, Dennis Kimbro, are like “*the man who guides a pushcart through the alley to pick up bottles and rags will remain between the shafts of his rickety cart as long as he believes that he has no talent for anything else.*” According to Frederick Douglass, the American Abolitionist, “*the history of civilization shows that no people can rise to a high degree of mental or even moral excellence without wealth. A people uniformly poor and compelled to struggle for barely a physical existence will be dependent and despised by their neighbours and will finally despise themselves.*”

Mr. Chairman:

So what role do we as Africans and our institutions of higher education have to do to develop the requisite leadership and knowledge to spur innovation and industrial development? Apart from the aforementioned suggestions given in this speech, one important last point is that, **really, it is up to us. Our destiny in this regard is largely in our hands.** Here is Frederick Douglas again, “*if we find we shall have to seek. If we succeed in the race for life it must be by our own energies, and our own*

exertions. Others may clear the road, but we must go forward or be left behind in the race for life. If we remain poor and dependent, the wealth of others will not avail us. If we are ignorant, the intelligence of others will do but little for us. If we are wasteful of our time and money, the economy of others will only make destitution the more disgraceful.”

Thank You.

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