Remarks from the Patron

It is with great pleasure that we launch the inaugural series of workshops focusing on our community and country. These workshops, which will run bi-annually, would form the basis of the proposed Nyamira Centre for Leadership & Business.

The purpose of these workshops is to help us Kenyans in general and Nyamira people in particular, to focus on innovation through knowledge-sharing and pooling of resources. As they say, umoja ni nguvu and that kidole kimoja hakiui chawa.

Sharing of ideas will help shed light on new possibilities while collaboration would strengthen and hence raise the chances of success of those ideas that may arise. This is an empowering endeavour; it teaches us how to fish rather than give us fish! It is NOT about handouts but a means to learn to earn our keep!

Innovation is of timely importance in Kenya, and especially in Gusii, considering the dwindling economic opportunities. Unlike old days where children inherited sizable chunks of land from their fathers, land sizes in Gusii continue to diminish; indeed, they have reached a degree where they cannot sustain meaningful economic output.

Many of our young people remain unemployed or underemployed many years after completing school; they now compete for jobs with those that may not have acquired similar qualifications. That said, regardless of anyone’s education level or station in life, every Kenyan is entitled to a livelihood as a means of both survival and personal dignity. Indeed, as a society we continue to lose considering that we are not getting full value of the investment we put in the education of our people. Yet we watch as we face wasted potential in our human capacity!

Unfortunately, over many decades, the government has been the main source of employment in Kenya. Yet the government’s capacity to continue creating jobs is limited and continues to decline by the day. In the future, we must seek that government, rather than providing employment, creates a situation where Kenyans can create employment themselves.

In Gusii we say that gakiaborire ‘nchera rogoro, kerigerie ‘nchera maate, it means we have to do things differently because old ways (‘nchera rogogo) have reached a limit. We must innovate and try other ways: ‘nchera maate!

Part of the process of innovation is looking inward to better understand how to tap into our own potential. And we may be trampling on opportunities as we speak; these are opportunities that seek a change in perspective. It reminds me of the following from a military warfront. The conversation goes something like this:
**Soldier:** Officer I have reported to work, sir!

**Officer:** Welcome soldier!

**Soldier:** Sir, I see that every soldier has a foxhole

**Officer:** Yes soldier!

**Soldier:** Where is mine?

**Officer:** Soldier, hear me!

**Soldier:** Yes sir!

**Officer:** You have one!

**Soldier:** Where?

**Officer:** You are standing on one! Find a spade and dig up some dirt!

Often, we are like the soldier in this conversation! We just need to find the spade and “dig up some dirt”!

Here are a few approaches pertaining to entrepreneurship right in our midst:

(a) How can we tap into the potential in our area to raise both income and provide employment? For example, let’s ask what value add we can create from products in our area. Example: avocado grows well and a lot of it goes to waste. Is there a way that the produce could be processed and packaged for super markets of the nation? If so, which way? How can it be done? Where can people raise the money to accomplish this? How can they manage the operations? Clearly, if this were to happen, it would not only provide employment for many people but also earn higher incomes for avocado farmers.

(b) How about our bananas? I am told that in Kitutu Masaba a few young people have started a banana factory which converts bananas into banana flour? In the process they may not simply provide employment and earn profits, they would also stimulate banana production. This is a group worth emulating!

(c) There is more! Horticulture is BIG business in Kenya and the world. Over years, Kenya has seen substantial growth in horticulture exports and hence foreign exchange earnings from this business. In general, the income from horticulture farming is several-fold higher than from ordinary farming. Can we explore how we can get such industry going in Gusii? Think about it: we have an airstrip in Suneka (President Kibaki’s government has promised an upgrade to full airport status) and we have arable land. Suppose we farmed horticultural crops (flowers, French beans, etc.) and pooled our resources in a cooperative. We could harvest fresh produce in the morning; the produce would be in Suneka in the afternoon headed for Nairobi before the evening flights to Europe!
And it would be in European supermarkets and grocery shops the following day!

(d) With the Internet, it is possible to do work in Nyamira for a client anywhere in the world. With the coming of high-speed Internet, opportunities remain galore. A good example is our publishing business, Nsemia Inc. Publishers. While we live in Canada, our writers are mainly in Kenya. Our editors reside all over the world, including the Caribbean; our illustrators are in Nairobi while our books are hosted and printed in the USA! Think about it: is there a way you can position yourself to take advantage of global opportunities out there? Examples: transcribing claims, outsourced accounting, program development and the like. We need to explore how this can be done.

(e) There is more. Gusii is a net consumer of iron sheets yet there is no factory of that kind anywhere in the region! Suppose people got together and sourced financing from banks, is it not possible to build such a factory? Think about it!

(f) Some people may ask where to get the capital. To that I answer that there is money in Kenya and the world. Indeed, I am told that Kenyan banks have lowered borrowing barriers; and that we just need business plans and sound management in order to get any loans. What we need, and this is part of our vision, is to impart knowledge and help with experience that would allow our people to build businesses and ensure discipline that would result in business success.

Sakagwa once said that *amandegere name Getembe, ore n’abamura nayae!* According to my understanding, this means that new forms of wealth would happen and only those prepared would harvest that wealth.

The person who takes the lead would reap huge benefits. Just consider the size of the market in Gusii! As much as we cry that there are too many people for resources available, these large numbers are essentially a market for any potential entrepreneur.

Here are examples from leadership

(a) Often I hear the words “leaders of tomorrow” bandied around in our community. It asks young people to wait to lead when their time comes. Let me tell you that the time is now. As US President Barack Obama would say: yes you can! Young people especially need to broaden minds beyond family, clan, constituency and ethnicity. The Kenya of the future requires broad-minded individuals that can focus on the *common good* and leadership that would bring change for all of us Kenyans. For, as it
is said, collaboration increases our capabilities and harnesses our potential at higher levels than would otherwise be the case. It is upon us all, young and old, to lead today and push our limits to our potential.

(b) Ask yourself what you have done lately to be of service to the community. Have you considered how our community would survive in the future in the face of dwindling land holdings? Can we be creative and plan thinking about urbanization so that land in our traditional homes can be used for food production? Have we considered that we may need to consolidate individual plots so that farming can be worthwhile? This is NOT a pipedream! The fact is that the continued land subdivision is NOT sustainable in the long run.

(c) How about the environment? In the old days, we had many species of animals and plants in our area. Birds such as the crested crane (ekong’a) can long be seen. Plants, some of them medicinal, have almost disappeared as all the land falls under cultivation for cash or food crops? Ask yourself how you can make the change. How have other people in the world managed conservation? What can we learn from them? And how can we exploit our heritage the flora and fauna for economic gain? (NB: medicinal plants are worth several billion dollars in trade worldwide.)

(d) The Mau has been in the news lately, which touches on dwindling water supplies and floods during the rainy season. How about wetlands? Have we thought of how they will affect us in the long run? And can we reclaim those wetlands and use them for economic gain. For instance, can we use chitente for fish farming while they serve their role as water reservoirs, filters and regulate water flow?

(e) Often we hear stories of crime happening in Gusii. As young people and leaders, how can you help stem that tide of degeneration? Would criminal energy be channelled to fruitful endeavours that can benefit you and society? We need leadership in this. And that may in creating jobs so that energies that would be directed at crime would be channelled towards constructive work and honestly earned income.

(f) Speaking of leadership: how about at the national level? The clashes and killings following the last elections should be wake up calls for us all. We need to travel and interact better with fellow Kenyans. Indeed, as Ongeng’o Rikurunyal sings: one cannot call oneself educated when one is born in one place, grows up there and dies there and thinks one knows a lot!. Mogusii says that egesomo nigo kegokinia; tikeri kong’ainia – you can grow up physically in an isolated; you might not know much beyond your immediate environment! So get out and see
the world, as Ong‘eng’o urges. That way, we can judge for ourselves when we hear this or that! That tribe or this tribe! And we can then avoid being manipulated. There is no reason for a Kenyan to kill another Kenyan for the sake of a politician. If and when we are confronted with situations like this, we must remember that we are sailing in the same boat; and that when that boat sinks, we will all do so. We had a taste of it back in 2008 when the country went up in flames. It is thus important that we resist being used but rather act in the interest of the Kenyan nation. And that requires leadership.

I want to thank you for this opportunity and hope that you will learn from today’s meeting. Please ask questions and seek knowledge that would help improve your well-being and that of our people.

Remember that a journey of a thousand words starts with one step; and that any failure offers experience and chance NOT to commit the same mistake in the future. And that collective good, done by all of us, adds up! And that we are better off together than apart.

Further, identify how we can be of help in shaping your ideas and opportunities for a better future for us all.

Remember, together, we can. And I promise you that in my capacity, reach and influence, I will be on that journey with you.

Enjoy and do have the very best of the Holiday Season.

Signed
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