

Speech by the Chief Guest Speaker, Dr. Florence Wambugu, CEO, Africa Harvest during the 44th Graduation Ceremony at Kenyatta University

Friday 03 August 2018

The Chancellor, Kenyatta University – Dr. Benson I. Wairegi,

The Chief Administrative Secretary and Principal Secretary,

State Department for University Education and Research, Ministry of Education – Prof. Collette A. Suda;

The Chairman of Kenyatta University Council – Prof. Shem Migot-Adholla;

Members of Kenyatta University Council;

Vice-Chancellor of Kenyatta University – Prof. Paul K. Wainaina;

Your Excellences the Ambassadors and High Commissioners present;

Chancellors of other Universities;

Vice-Chancellors present;

Members of University Senate;

Staff and Students of Kenyatta University;

Parents and Guardians;

Graduands;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I'm greatly honoured to have been invited to address you today on the occasion of your 44th graduation ceremony and most importantly to celebrate this significant day with all those of you that are graduating.

Congratulations graduands!

I have no doubt in my mind that you have longed for this day. Like a farmer, you carefully sowed your seeds and today you get to reap the harvest. Congratulations! Your lecturers, professors, parents, family and friends are proud of you. You have every reason to celebrate!

Today marks the beginning of what I hope and pray will be a rewarding journey for you all. A journey full of possibilities, a journey full of opportunities, a journey of self-discovery for the benefit of humanity.

But we all know that however desirable new beginnings may be, they can sometimes bring uncertainty and anxiety. Anxiety about securing a job, repaying your HELB loan, your family's and community's expectations. You have received quality education in your areas of specialization and the tools, academic, spiritual, moral and sociocultural values needed to succeed, Kenya, Africa and the world is looking up to you.

And going by the graduation theme, "**Education for the Attainment of Kenya's Big Four Agenda**", the nation is expecting you to play your role towards these goals.

New Dawn

The anxiety you may be experiencing is not new to me. As I look at you today, I remember sitting on the other side of this podium, like you are seated today, waiting to receive my first degree in B.S. Botany and Zoology, four decades ago. It was a new beginning in my life: a new dawn. And like some of you, the pressure was on! You see, I grew up surrounded by hunger but even this did not deter my mother from selling our only cow in order to send me to school. So, when I finally graduated, being the first girl in my village, I had mixed feelings. The joy, you bet I was overjoyed! Anxious? Certainly, for I knew that a lot was expected of me! During my time, the whole village would hire a bus, send representatives because they felt the degree belonged to them as a whole. They expected you to make a difference and be a role model.

Have a vision: Live a purpose-filled life

In that moment, I resolved to do the one thing that I also encourage you to do:

I resolved to live life with purpose in order to leave a legacy!

Certainly, when I was growing up, the world we lived in was very different from the one you now find yourselves. The employment opportunities for those with university degrees were many. However, we all know that in current day Kenya, 90% of the unemployed are below 35 years, with the largest unemployment rate recorded in your age group: those aged between 20-24 years. And even though the poverty rate in Kenya is lower than the Sub-Saharan African regional average, we still have 36.1% living below the international poverty line, earning less than USD 2 dollars a day. With recurrent droughts, 10 million Kenyans are chronically food insecure and this number will increase in the traditional food production set-up. I do not mean to discourage you, rather to motivate you with the stark reality into which you are graduating.

Regardless of the outlook, Benjamin Disraeli's wisdom that "**the youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity**" is still as pertinent today as it was then.

And this wisdom ties in very well with my strong beliefs that everyone is born unique and has a unique role to play in this world. That unique role can only be fulfilled by that particular individual, and that is what forms their purpose. You need to understand that your purpose is greater than meeting your personal needs. What will people and society remember you for at large?

The opportunities available to this generation far surpass those that my generation had at their disposal. Undoubtedly, countless opportunities exist in a country that has registered GDP growth rates above 5% over the past decade. Better still, Kenya's **Vision 2030** and the **Big Four Agenda** spells out the country's development blueprint and backs it with the required financing. With declining employment, it does not make sense to continue with the traditional thinking of seeking employment. Now that you have received higher education, the government is relying on you to create employment, and it has made this possible through financing frameworks like the Youth Enterprise Development Fund, UWEZO Fund, Biashara Kenya Fund, ENABLE Youth and others that you can seize. After all, you have now been equipped with the right tools to take on any challenge. And in this country, challenges abound.

The proverbial phrase that when life gives you lemons, make lemonade has never been more pertinent to your generation. Where Kenya spends USD 40 million to import commodities like rice, maize, sugar, wheat that we can grow locally, make lemonade. Where Kenyan farmers lose 20% of cereals post-harvest before they reach the market, make lemonade. Not literally but metaphorically. With the modern ICT, agricultural, manufacturing technologies that you have now interacted with in your courses, it is time for you to take leadership and create opportunities for those with fewer prospects. This means using your knowledge to develop or apply the innovative technologies needed for higher yields, reducing food losses and wastage through processing.

It is now up to you to clearly define your purpose, the North Star, and let your vision determine where you need to be at what time.

Well, while I'd love to stand here and share all the different principles on living a life with a purpose, today I will share my own life with you.

After completing my post-doctoral fellowship in the USA, I was offered the opportunity to settle in the USA but declined because I recognized that my purpose lay in using my knowledge to help fight poverty, hunger and malnutrition back in Africa. Beyond any doubt, my strongest conviction was that Africa needed science-driven agricultural productivity, focusing on the needs of the poor grassroots communities and that technology and innovation would play a role to solve the agricultural and food crisis in the continent. With my education and experience, in partnership with others, we needed to fulfil that purpose. I stepped out and faced the world ready to fulfil my dream. Africa Harvest Biotech Foundation International was founded on these principles.

Africa Harvest has experienced tremendous growth in the last ten years. We are, today, a formidable organization that delivers sustainable agricultural solutions to improve food security. We raise the incomes of small scale, rural farmer communities while ensuring healthy rural populations through access to better nutrition and healthy lifestyles.

I often shudder at the thought of not embracing the change of setting up Africa Harvest. What would have become of the thousands of farmers who have benefited from resources

and knowledge that have helped uplift them from subsistence to business-minded rural entrepreneurs? Where would Africa be without Africa Harvest's leadership in the dissemination and adoption of innovative agricultural technologies like TC Banana, Improved Sorghum, Cassava, Sweet-Potato, Beans as well as livestock to farmers in Africa?

Always remember that your fear to embrace change and contribute in your area of purpose to the society involves a high cost, not only to you, but many others who would have benefited from your courage and engagement.

Take calculated risks

Whether you like it or not, you are always taking a risk. If you refuse to take risks, your personal growth will be retarded. A baby who refuses to take the first step because of fear takes long to walk!

Starting Africa Harvest involved taking a major risk. However, based on my savings of about US\$50,000, we have built a multi-million dollar organization. My choice to take the risk consistent with my purpose has paid off greatly. Other people and institutions that identify with my purpose have joined me in the fight against hunger, poverty and malnutrition in Africa.

A few years later, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded USD 18.6 million to a consortium of seven African Institutions led by Africa Harvest in partnership with DuPont Pioneer and UC Berkeley to implement the African Biofortified Sorghum Project. The project targeted 4 countries in Africa including Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria and Burkina Faso with a focus on enhancing nutritional quality and digestibility of the sorghum grain, which is used as a staple by 300 million people in Africa. In addition, our value chain projects have been supported by a number of development partners including IFAD, USAID, DuPont Pioneer, Rockefeller Foundation, AGRA, AusAID, Global Affairs Canada and others. These partners identify with our vision of supporting smallholder farmers in Africa to access technologies, increase productivity, develop the whole value chain, linking them to markets.

I believe that if the risk you take is within your purpose, the benefits always outweigh the risk in the long term. But note that as we take calculated risks, sometimes we fail. But never allow yourself to be put down by a failure. When taken positively, failure leaves us stronger because we learn from it.

Don't settle in the comfort zone

We must refuse to settle in the comfort zones if we are to succeed. In my life, I have had several opportunities to settle in the comfort zone. I had job offers, which provided an opportunity to remain in the USA after my postgraduate studies. But I chose to return to my motherland, Kenya, to pursue my "African Dream". Similarly, I had the choice of taking up a well-paid job after leaving ISAAA, but I chose to start Africa Harvest.

Settling in the comfort zone often implies losing sight of your purpose. In Africa one of the powerful tools of communication we use is storytelling. Africa is an oral culture. Allow me to narrate one of those stories:

There was drought in the land, which adversely affected the animal kingdom. As a result animals ate the food they gathered sparingly except one animal, that is, hyena. So one day, in

its hungry state, it went to look for water to cool its empty belly. It was just growling until it bent down to reach out for the scarce water. In that silence, it heard some noise and quickly lifted its head. From afar it saw a calf, which was caught in a thicket. Limping, the hyena dashed to the calf's direction. It noticed that the calf was tied to a rope that was caught in one of the trees. The hyena studied the situation and asked: "What will I eat first; the rope or the calf?" Guess what he went for?

Well, Mr. Hyena decided to eat the rope first and then sit down and enjoy his calf meal. But what happened after taking the first bite of the rope? Of course the calf took off leaving the hyena mourning!!!

Opportunities present themselves but sometimes we may lack the insight to notice them, and like the hyena we first concentrate on small matters. We must have the big picture in mind: our purpose and carefully select the pieces of puzzle that would fill the purpose. We also need to critically analyse every opportunity that presents itself. Had the hyena closely studied the situation, he would have realized the imprudence of eating the rope first.

Continuously pursue knowledge and skills that will help you achieve your purpose

As you think about fulfilling your purpose, it becomes clear that money is important. However, your purpose is greater than money, profession or career. You must align your life with your purpose. To do this effectively, it is essential to develop an attitude of learning. You need to learn from experiences, from other people, do your own research and read widely.

My experience is that God divinely places people and orchestrates situations that enable you to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to your purpose.

Don't settle for too little when there is much more inside and out there for you

Think of the hyena, it settled for too little when there was much more. Many people short-change themselves in life. First, the attitude you develop towards yourself is critical here. The image you create about yourself is the same image that will follow you.

As you seek to fulfil your purpose you must believe in your dream; you must believe that it is possible to accomplish it. You must believe that in partnership with others, you are the best person to be at the centre of that dream. Also have it at the back of your mind that even if others deserted you, you would still carry on.

Similarly, apply the knowledge you have acquired in the last few years to different aspects of life. Don't focus on a small part of life. Although a trained scientist, I'm no longer a scientist per se. My work involves socio-political and policy issues related to poverty, hunger and malnutrition. As I apply my scientific knowledge to areas beyond science, I expand my opportunities. I have refused to be boxed in by a narrow definition. My purpose is beyond science. My purpose is managing science and scientists for greater impact to target communities. Equally, whatever you have studied is only a beginning. Use it to reach higher!

The power of a personal vision

Personal vision is what links you to your life's purpose. A vision is a powerful mental image of how you want things to be in future. It is derived from discovering who you are and what makes you tick. Every human being has a God-given vision but it is our responsibility to discover it. My challenge to you is to seek to discover your vision and purpose, if you have not done that already.

As you pursue your vision also remember:

Having a heart of gratitude opens doors of opportunity. Someone has said "The happiest of people don't necessarily have the best of everything; they just make the best of everything that comes along their way."

Secondly, "the brightest future will always be based on a forgotten past". Do not allow the failures and heartaches of yesterday whisper defeat every time you want to take a step. Learn from your mistakes, forgive where there is need to and conquer the next wall.

I thank God because he gave me the wisdom and strength to face the challenges associated with my vision. When you stick to your Godly vision, He always makes a way; not just because of you, but because of the thousands... perhaps, millions, who will benefit from your vision and purpose in life.

As you follow these principles and others that you may learn, seek to have a mentor or coach. A coach is an advocate for the success of agreed upon goals. You are still young and a number of distractions may come your way. To maximize on your time, have a coach or a mentor who will act as your accountability partner.

Finally I wish you God's blessings as you step out. Thank you.