

ADDRESS BY
H.E CHARITY KALUKI NGILU, GOVERNOR OF KITUI COUNTY
AT THE
5TH GRADUATION CEREMONY OF SOUTH EASTERN KENYA UNIVERSITY
TUESDAY 27TH FEBRUARY, 2018

Chancellor of South Eastern Kenya University;

Chairman and Members of the University Council;

Members of the University Senate;

Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors, and all your staff present;

The graduands, our special guests for this occasion, and members of your families; friends who have come to bear witness to this great occasion.

Good Morning.

Chancellor, I wish to thank you most sincerely for inviting me once again to come here as a guest at this convocation and your 5th graduation ceremony. The South Eastern Kenya University is our home University – *hiini ya nyumbani* - and we are very proud of you.

As the Governor of Kitui County, let me also extend a very warm welcome to all the visitors whom I know have come from all corners of Kenya to attend this ceremony. I trust that you have been treated generously by our very warm hearted people. When you go back to your homes please be our ambassadors, put in a good word for Kitui and ask your people to visit here more often. Wherever your home is, Kitui is not far – *Kitui No Vaa!*

Chancellor, this is a day for us to congratulate these young men and women for the very hard work that they have put in to get their degrees. We also congratulate their families for the great sacrifices that they have made to see their sons and daughters go through university, some of them with just their bare hands.

Hongera, congratulations to all of you. You have done very well and I am very proud of you.

Even as we congratulate you, I know that you and your families have a lot of anxieties about the future, especially about whether you are going to get jobs. You are probably asking yourself whether I have come here to offer you jobs in my Government.

I want to assure you that jobs will be there, even if not here in Kitui, even if not now, jobs will be there. You have just started on a lifelong journey of career development, and you must remain hopeful, work hard for constant self-improvement, and trust God. All will be well.

Chancellor, I love the motto of your University – **FROM ARID TO GREEN**. This is not only a motto, but also a clarion call for the transformation that we need to see in this County. This County greatly needs to transform from arid to green.

You need a lot of courage to imagine that Kitui, or Ukambani in general, can actually transform from arid to green. But I have the courage – loads of it –

and I am sure that many men, women and youth in this County too have the courage and the commitment.

This University has unique resources that you can use to support development work in this region. You have vast expertise for research and training. You have huge tracts of land where you can apply the research and training. You have huge reservoirs of skilled and unskilled labour within your university community and the surrounding community.

Chancellor, we request that you use more of these resources to help us improve the economic productivity of this region and the livelihoods of our people.

As you are aware, I was elected as Governor by the honourable people of Kitui County on a platform of 5 big needs. These are:

1. Food and water;
2. Healthcare;
3. Education and Youth Empowerment
4. Women Empowerment
5. Wealth creation

Chancellor, these big five issues are not priority agenda just for me, they are also agenda for all the leadership and institutions in this County. As the premier research and training institution in this region, these issues are also agenda for SEKU. I believe that this institution has the wherewithal and the potential to make great contributions in helping us to tackle these needs.

As a County Government we appeal for your partnership in any programmes that can help us to address these needs. I believe you can partner with us in some, even if not all, of the following areas:

1. Water conservation, especially developing new methods for collection and storage of water;
2. Land reclamation and re-afforestation
3. Pasture farming in support of our livestock sector
4. Crop agriculture, and research on high value crops that can do well this region;
5. Research on value addition for our food crops, honey, meat and leather;
6. Mining, including prospecting for minerals in this region and technology for artisanal mining

A particular area that I want to emphasize, Chancellor, is the training of our youth in skills, crafts and hospitality. I know probably this University is all programmed to offer degrees and diplomas. But we have in this County thousands of young men and women who have never gone beyond secondary school or even primary school. My Government would like to look at the possibility of partnering with you in a Youth Empowerment Skills training program (YES), where we train these youth in very practical industrial skills in leather work, garment making, ceramics, food processing.

If at the end of the day we can have cottage industries that grew in this region out of the influence of this University; if at the end of the day we can

have greener Kitui and greener Ukambani out of the influence of this University, then we can say yes, the vision and dreams of those who started UKAI in this place have come to life!

Chancellor, this University was meant to be an institution for dryland research – that was the vision of the founders of UKAI, the precursor of SEKU. We still need that kind of institution here, perhaps now even more than ever before.

Lastly let me say something on the issue of environmental degradation, a matter that is very dear to our County. When I was elected as Governor in August last year I found that, sadly, this County was moving in the opposite direction – ***from arid to more arid!*** In the last 10 years this County has witnessed massive destruction of our forests and woodlands. The main culprits in this crime are merchants from other Counties who invade our lands with power saws, and hack down the few indigenous trees that we have.

The other culprits are us – you and me – good people who see all this happening but we do nothing because “we love peace and we value good neighbourliness”.

I have decided that I am going to be the one person who will not keep quiet while our neighbours raid and rape our land, sweep the sand which stores our water, cut down our trees to make charcoal, and make our County to change from arid to more arid!

As the Governor of your host County, I want to stress our commitment to working with this Institution in the pursuit of improvements for our dry lands, improvement of the livelihoods of our people, and assurance of a sustainable future for our children.

My administration is committed to protect our environment and no amount of intimidation will cower us. Kitui County is open for business. We are open for Ndengu, Mango, Livestock and other similar business. We are NOT OPEN for charcoal and sand business! For those who want to do these two businesses, find another County. Not in Kitui.

Thank you very much and God Bless you.