

**Mount Kenya**



**University**

**SPEECH**

**BY**

**PROF. RICHARD SIKORA  
CHIEF GUEST**

**ON**

**BUILDING RESEARCH CULTURE ON THE  
OCCASION OF 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADUATION CEREMONY**

**ON**

**FRIDAY, 7<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2015**

**AT**

**MOUNT KENYA UNIVERSITY HAPPY VALLEY  
GROUNDS, THIKA**

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

- I would like to acknowledge the presence of
- The Founder of Mount Kenya University (MKU) and Chairman, Board of Trustees, Dr. Simon Gicharu
- Chancellor, Prof. Victoria Wulsin
- Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education, Prof. Jacob Kaimenyi
- Chairman of the University Council Prof. Grace Njoroge and Members of the University Council
- Members of the Board of Trustees and Council and staff
- Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Stanley W. Waudo
- Students
- Distinguished Guests

And all the parents, friends and relative of the graduands

## Ladies and Gentlemen

- When I listen to the contents of my own Resume as just read to you by Pro-Chancellor Prof. Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha, I remember those who worked with me in my research and in writing those publications and allowing me to accept those awards– **my students**.
- They were students just like you graduands here today, who worked together with me in my research program throughout my career. They helped me in my career and I never forget their enormous contributions.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I sincerely appreciate the honour you have bestowed upon me, to be the Chief Guest on this auspicious occasion of the 8<sup>th</sup> Congregation of Mount Kenya University Graduation Ceremony.

However, I must admit that if I would have known beforehand that I would be addressing seven-times as

many people in my talk as that given by Barack Obama, the President of the USA in Nairobi last week, I probably would not have slept for weeks.

May I first congratulate all the graduands, their parents, spouses, friends and relatives on the academic achievements we are celebrating today.

I also wish to acknowledge the support provided by the Mount Kenya University community to these graduands.

Madam Chancellor, I know today is your day, but allow me also to congratulate the Chairman of the Mount Kenya University Board of Trustees, Dr. Simon Gicharu, Chairperson of the Mount Kenya University Council, Prof. N. Njoroge, the Vice-Chancellor Prof. Stanley Waudu, members of the university board of trustees, council, senate and management of the university for promoting public-private partnerships to further academic progress.

These public-private partnerships that you and the vice-chancellor and Board of trustees have promoted,

alongside the initiatives that you are undertaking through the Thika Level 5 Hospital partnership, will, without doubt, make immense contribution to the training of students in all disciplines at MKU and especially in health sciences and in the development of human capacity in the health sector.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

My speech today is divided into three parts.

First I would like to say something more personal about the person standing in front of you.

This will be followed by my views on the need for a research culture at the Mount Kenya University and how well they are prepared for this challenge

And, finally, I would like to give what is called a CHARGE – a provocative statement sending off the

graduands to make their mark on Kenyan society and the world.

### **Now about myself.**

I was born into a second generation immigrant family in Chicago. My family tree is made up of Hungarians, Poles and now Germans.

I married a wonderful German woman and have two hybrids as sons. My sons will be graduating in 6 months at which time I also will have the honor to sit in the audience and be proud of their accomplishments like your parents and relatives here today. I am also a hybrid of sorts an American/European.

It is also unique that I lived 7 miles from Barak Obama on the southwest side of Chicago. We both were educated in USA universities and we followed different career paths. I believe I have had the easier job by far.

- Obama as president has made major changes in the world

- I as an educator, scientist and researcher have made changes in how we produce the food we eat and have been mentor throughout my career to a large number of students - like the graduands sitting before me right now.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen and graduands**

Martin Luther King in a famous speech given on August 28, 1963 in Washington DC, a speech that I will never forget, exclaimed “I have a dream today, oh I have a dream!” he changed the world that day.

Dr. Simon Gicharu, the founder of this university, also had a dream and that dream has been fulfilled as seen today in the 9500 graduands getting their diplomas and certificates.

The chancellor and vice-chancellor also have a dream - making MKU a leader in education and research in Kenya

and beyond. This dream has also been realized and they are continually improving on this record of achievement.

I am sure all of you graduands have a dream – that your future will be fulfilling and successful. Somehow I believe this is guaranteed by the vast amount of knowledge gained from your excellent training here at MKU.

You graduands will play a major role in the future of Kenya.

### **My theme today is Building a Research Culture**

The question must be raised as to why do we need a research culture at MKU?

About 50 years ago, I received my BS degree in the USA, I was 22 years old. I went on to obtain an MS and PhD



and then devoted my entire career to education and research.

I know from firsthand experience that university teachers who are actively involved in research make the best educators and mentors of young students.

There is no better alternative to an active and innovative mind than that found in an educator involved in generating new knowledge through research.

The Kenya constitution 2010 recognizes the need for developing a research culture as a means of achieving the Kenya Vision 2030. All universities in Kenya have a role in the process of achieving that Vision.

The work of institutions of higher education has traditionally been trifocal, consisting of teaching, research and community service/extension. This traditional trinity is expected to operate in relation to the specific goals and mission of a particular university.

The strategic directions of the university influence the level of concentration on each task to be achieved as envisioned in the university's mission and vision.

Mount Kenya University (MKU) has a research policy that provides a framework to ensure that the research programmes of the university are relevant, necessary, efficient and effective. MKU recognizes the importance of research as a key component of the university mission. This recognition aims at building a research culture in the university. In this part of my speech I will focus on the theme of building a research culture in institutions of higher learning and more specifically Mount Kenya University (MKU).

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

**What is a research culture?** Research has been defined as a process embracing the systematic generation of knowledge, development of new ideas and experimentation with new techniques. These activities provide the foundation for student learning and provide an

intellectual platform for engaging in knowledge transfer through teaching.

Research therefore is closely intertwined with teaching. I personally have been teaching since 1970 many of my students came from Africa and from Kenya in particular, and the importance of the knowledge gained from my research (conducted jointly with my students) has made me what I am and has allowed me to give my students high quality training. This would not have been possible without the research culture present in the German university system where professors do the vast majority of teaching not just their teaching assistants.

According to Cheetham's (2007) definition,

**Research becomes the first strand of a research culture,** embracing the systematic generation of new knowledge.

**The second strand is Learning and Teaching.**

Education takes known concepts and ideas, supported by research to instill habits of inquiry that reflect the provisional nature of knowledge

**The final strand is knowledge transfer.** It encompasses many dimensions of interaction between academia and the wider society- from the way public intellectuals use media platforms to participate in debate, to policy work for government, to application by industry and through communities contracting research and education services.

Cheetham's model is logical and progressive in that it fuses the three strands which attract and build strong staff (research), produces high quality students (through teaching and learning) and makes innovative impact on the community (through both).

**The next question that we need to address, then, is why are we concerned about a research culture MKU?**

I have heard people argue that without students there shall be no university, (I have always believe that students are a

universities customers) but we also need to appreciate the truism that without excellent and productive educators conducting modern research, there would not be a modern university of excellence to train our students, those sitting in front of me today.

Research culture is crucial and central to any university because:

- ✓ It is the basis of how university education works. A university that lacks a research culture cannot claim positive contribution to society.
- ✓ It is the intellectual life blood of our staff. If the university academic staff do not involve themselves in research then they really do not deserve to be part of a modern academic community
- ✓ It should be the fundamental source of support for teaching. A research culture generates new ideas, making teaching productive.
- ✓ It is a basis of our support for our community. Without a research culture, a university cannot boast of positive contribution to society.

- ✓ It increases the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society (Cheetham, 2007)

**Now that we are talking about a research culture, we need to know exactly what it is.**

- ✓ Research is a learned behavior which starts with basic education and progresses to higher education.
- ✓ Research culture is the structure that gives that behavior significance and allows us to understand and evaluate research activity.
- ✓ University research culture is a systematic process structured around the learned behavior of the staff and students that allows us to transfer the knowledge gained through this systematic process to our students and community.
- ✓ I must emphasize that the structure becomes the cultural context that we must strive to build on - it is in continuous development.

A University cannot stop researching and learning or we risk becoming irrelevant and even absurd.

## Lastly may I turn to **Building a Research culture at Mount Kenya University**

Ladies and gentlemen, I have had the privilege to gather information on research culture at Mount Kenya University both from the literature and from the staff.

In spite of being a young University, established on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008, Mount Kenya University has made significant progress in building a research culture by formulating, introducing and implementing a series of necessary and important strategies and policies.

I would like to use the next part of my presentation to outline the main objectives of these strategies and policies:

Extremely important is the MKU Research Policy which governs activities related to research and has eleven objectives namely:

- To enhance research skills among staff
- To enhance research capacity
- To institutionalize ethical ethos in research
- To enhance postgraduate research and training

- To increase the quality and relevance of research output
- To utilize research results
- To protect intellectual rights
- To promote corporate image and promote social responsibility
- To ensure that research results and technologies are effectively disseminated to stakeholders.
- To equip, encourage and motivate researchers and collaborators to conduct research.
- To develop a framework to upscale and commercialize research outputs and innovations.

The objectives of the University Intellectual Property Policy which addresses the ownership and utilization of research output are to:

- ❖ Create awareness within the University community on intellectual property rights and its importance.
- ❖ Protect intellectual property rights of the University, its creators, innovators, collaborative, research sponsors and the public.
- ❖ Encourage innovation disclosures and protection.



- ❖ Ensure fair and equitable distribution of all benefits accruing from all innovations, creations and inventions.
- ❖ Promote linkages with industry and stimulate research through developing and utilizing novel technologies and creative works for commercialization and plough back resources to the University and to the sponsoring parties.

The University Institutional Academic Linkages Policy ensures that the University enters into strategically and synergistically beneficial partnerships.

The University equipment policy provides a framework for acquisition, deployment, maintenance, audit, loan, hire, renewal and disposal of items of equipment that are in the University equipment register.

The objectives of the University Biosafety and research ethics policy are to:

- Provide a framework for ensuring safe and secure work environment in laboratories, workshops, greenhouses, animal houses and experimental fields.
- Ensure compliance with national and international legislations and treaties on laboratory safety, biosafety and general research ethics.
- Provide guidelines for laboratory managers to ensure the safety of users and the environment.
- Ensure that all experiments carried out at the University are consistent with general research ethics.

The University Mentorship Policy objectives are to:

- Promote an environment that nurtures talent
- Facilitate exposure to decision making and leadership styles of seniors.
- Support enhancement of competencies and skills of quality service delivery and attainment of academic excellence and all round education.
- Facilitate the process of learning institutional culture
- Promote professional and ethical practices
- Nurture juniors into positions of leadership
- Promote sharing of experiences
- Promote character transformation

- Enhance professional growth
- Expand knowledge skills and practices
- Enhance individual confidence and career aspirations.

The University Academic Advisory Services objectives are to:

- ❖ Promote student academic performance
- ❖ Promote a highly interactive and personalized learning environment
- ❖ Foster professional relationship
- ❖ Respond to student academic concerns
- ❖ Organize careers and job placement seminars.

The University also has a Research, Enterprise Development Centre headed by a Director. Some of the functions of the Centre are:

- (i) Development of a strong multi-disciplinary research culture and encourage synergy.
- (ii) Provide assistance to campuses, departments and schools on writing competitive research proposals.

- (iii) Mobilize financial and other resources for research.
- (iv) Coordinate all research activities.
- (v) Promote dissemination of research funding.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I will conclude my address today with the **CHARGE** to the graduands to move forward in the future.

It is my sincere hope and belief that the graduands, the alumni of Mount Kenya University and those to come in future will actively contribute to the desires of regional integration in East Africa and beyond.

There is no limit to what you graduands can achieve in the future with your MKU education.

Barack Obama the son of a Kenyan student has changed the world on many fronts. Because of the progress you have made in developing your knowledge here at MKU you can work to build your future and that of Kenya and do that starting tomorrow.

Last week President Obama stated that the problems of Africa must be solved in Africa by Africans. This will be done by the entrepreneurs of the future and that means you. So graduands

**CHARGE AHEAD**

**and don't forget**

**OH YES YOU CAN -- NOW GO OUT AND  
FULFILL THOSE DREAMS !!!**

May God keep you safe and happy with each new day.

Asante Sana