

## **“Making Africa Work Through the power of Innovative Volunteerism”**

By Dr. Richard Munang, UN Environment Africa Climate Change Coordinator,  
Speech given at the Riara University - Kenya

Thank you so much for the generous introduction. It's an honor for me to be in this prestigious institution today. You are pioneering development solutions which will not only help address the multitude of challenges facing Africa and the world today- but you are bringing to the fore the critical reasoning and preparing the next generation of citizens to see things through an Innovative solution lens -especially in this changing and increasingly technological world. The importance of this great university cannot be over emphasized. This is an important time. If ever there was a time to gather together, it is now

“A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast doesn't do so to redeem them from starving. They all have food in their own houses”. These words aptly describe our gathering here today. We gather not to eat, but to tap into opportunities that we cannot reach as individuals Opportunities that call on our collective efforts and OUR TOGETHERNESS to tap into. To solve problems that we cannot do in our silos and tap these opportunities to solve the monstrous challenges that we all share in common.

Because we know that - “When spiders unite they can tie down a Lion”.

(Grabber)

This is especially so now, when the mixed basket of challenges and opportunities confronting not only Kenya, but Africa are more inspiring than they are humbling. Am talking about food insecurity with 240 million going

to be hungry every day in Africa. Yet 65% of the global arable land is right here in Africa. Am talking of postharvest losses (PHLs) topping \$48 billion each year, exceeding the \$35 billion spent on imports. Implying that reversing these losses will inject \$83 billion into the regional economy every year. Right here, Kenya's PHLs amount to \$500 million each year. Reversing means injecting an extra KES 50 billion to the local economy.

I am talking of mothers in Africa burying their 5-year-old children because of hunger.

Am talking of energy poverty, with over 620 million living in the dark. Yet just 0.3% of the sunlight we have here, can supply nearly all of Europe's energy needs.

Am talking of climate change, which threatens productivity of the most critical sectors of our economy. Key among them, agriculture employing a majority in not only Kenya but Africa. Yet threatened by up to 40% productivity losses – translating to not only lost food but livelihoods as well

(Statement of Purpose)

Though these challenges may seem insurmountable, there is one challenge which if left unaddressed could have more dramatic consequences. This is the ballooning youthful and unemployed population- where for every 3 million jobs, we have up to 12 million youth competing for them. This has been christened a "ticking time bomb". Yet, these youths, including most of you here today, represent the most sovereign capital we have as a continent- which we can tap and maximize productivity of our most inclusive sector – agriculture. And as a result, create up to 17 million jobs. In Kenya, 1 in every 6 young people is unemployed.

Across Africa, such youths already, frustrated by the lack of opportunities, are risking it all – life, limb & dignity - on perilous journeys in search of elusive greener pastures in other continents. Without affordable, practical and innovative solutions to address these challenges, actualizing the SDGs with intend to leave no one behind will just be a far-fetched dream. It will just be a mirage. It will just be elusive.

In the words of an insightful African proverb – “it takes a village to raise a child”. It is our collective efforts that will turn these challenges into opportunities- because no problem of human destiny is beyond human beings.

(Thesis statement)

This continent doesn't lack Ideas. This continent doesn't lack Innovations. Africa has everything it takes to move from Talk to Action. The Africa I am talking about is the Africa where the energy and creativity of more than 200 million young women and men are creating new and exciting businesses and industries. But it is no longer tenable to keep talking about Africa's great potential; rather, it is time to fulfill that potential for the benefit of present and future generations. Africa's past has long been defined by natural resources and its future should be defined by bringing together the collective strengths of its people's skills and talent. That is the only way we can make Africa's history to be full of glory and dignity." But working towards this fulfillment is on the shoulders of each succeeding generation.

The message is one and it's very clear. The parable of lack amidst plentiful opportunities is Africa's Achilles heel and this needs to be addressed.

Drawing wisdom from a famous African proverb, “a man does not wander far from where his corn is roasting”. In its simplicity, this proverb tells us that Africa & Kenya will turn potential to solutions by focusing on its strengths. First, is the youth- Who at 60% of the population together with their collective skills, talents, initiative that we all represent as Africans is the most sovereign capital Africa has. Second, is maximizing productivity of the regions catalytic sectors. These are economically inclusive sectors for which Africa holds a global comparative advantage in resources. Productivity maximization in these sectors can ensure wealth opportunities are created simultaneously with building climate resilience. So the youth & the entire Africa’s human capital engaged in productivity maximization of Africa’s catalytic sector represents Africa’s roasting “corn”. Kenya and indeed the continent cannot afford to wander far from it. This is how Africa’s Achilles heel of unfulfilled potential will be resolved This is how self-discovery will be done.

And there is a formula to reaping this corn for self & those yet to be born There is a formula to this self-discovery. It is a formula premised on collectivism rather than individualism. It is a formula premised on selflessness rather than selfishness. It is a formula premised on hopefulness rather than hopelessness. It is a formula premised on leveraging the skills, experiences, talents, networks, initiatives of each one of us. And channeling to one end-goal - to maximize productivity of Africa’s catalytic sectors of clean energy amalgamation with nature based Ecosystem based Adaptation

(EBA) driven agriculture. This is the essence of what we call innovative volunteerism.

[Body]

Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, as the African proverb goes, "When the cock crows, it signals a new day". With this discussion, we are signaling the start of a new day, a new narrative to catalyze a new mindset and winning actions which are urgently needed if we are to truly create income & wealth opportunities and build climate resilience. If we are to turn the challenges of food insecurity, poverty, and unemployment into opportunities for the youth so they can lead as solution providers in Africa's journey to self-discovery.

And for us to ensure Africa's journey to self-discovery becomes a reality we MUST focus our collective efforts and resources in in what drive the development of Nations and regions.

Development starts from an engine and in Africa, Agriculture is this engine sector. Converging complementary sectors as auxiliary to drive productivity maximization around this engine sector constitutes the catalytic area. But Its not any kind of Agriculture but Agriculture that works with Nature what we call Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) driven agriculture but linked to clean energy based value addition.

And the writing is on the wall. Studies show that linking nature based Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) driven agriculture to clean energy to power value addition will help eliminate inefficiencies, such as post-harvest losses, currently accounting for an average annual loss of \$48 billion. It will mitigate carbon & reverse ecosystems degradation causing a loss of up to \$68bn annually. This integration is projected to potentially create as many as 17 million jobs along the entire agro-value chain, earn an additional \$20bn annually from agro-trade and catalyze an agro-sector projected to be worth \$1trillion in less than 13 years.

Lessons from far and wide show the timeless effectiveness of this approach of converging strengths around an engine sector. They have shown how a mineral-barren country roughly five times smaller than many African countries can grow its economy to become 15times the combined economies of all 55 countries in Africa. Yes, and am talking about South Korea ladies & gentlemen.

In 1962, just a year before many countries broke loose from the grip of colonial rule, South Korea, then a rickety Asian nation, faced with dry coffers, was laying the cornerstones of what would become the economic powerhouse we know today. Back then, Korea's agriculture accounting for 75% of its output, was its most critical sector as is the case for Africa today. But productivity was at an all-time low. So bad was the situation that in the face of acute starvation, Kenya gave a \$10,000 loan and relief food to South Korea in 1963. The loan was later repaid.

But more exciting is the lesson we gain from South Korea's rise. Its meteoric rise was based on maximizing on strategic industries of textile and clothing for exports. Then have all sectors converge towards complementing productivity maximization in this strategic area. The message is simple. Connecting the dots around an engine sector is the way to go.

Right here in Kenya, examples at small scale show the effectiveness of "connecting the dots". In Busia county, farm production being linked to value addition in form of solar driers is cutting post-harvest losses for one farmer allowing him to earn over KES 100,000 in just 3 months. These delightful results have encouraged this farmer to connect even more dots. He is investing in solar irrigation to increase cassava production. In Nyamira county, women farmers by connecting the dots have doubled their vegetable incomes by adopting solar driers to preserve their harvest. Colleagues, through connecting solar driers to farmers, the problem of post-harvest losses in Kenya can be turned into an additional 50 billion shilling every year. Some of you may leverage this and create worthy enterprises. If these are not incomes, if these are not jobs, then we must be blind.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies & gentlemen, in the words of one of my favorite African proverbs – "Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won't eat you". This seemingly amusing proverb appeals to a virtue that is universally shared across the continent – that of solidarity and unity of purpose. This is the gist of Innovative Volunteerism. This is the thinking with which to drive transformational change - But for this to happen we must connect the dots. Connecting the dots can only happen within an inclusive framework that brings everyone together and this is what resulted in the

establishment of the Ecosystems Based Adaptation for Food Security Assembly (EBAFOSA), this novel paradigm, of connecting the dots and leveraging human capital is being scaled across Kenya and 40 African countries.

Established collectively through a continental process facilitated by the UN Environment and the African Union – both of which Kenya is a member, EBAFOSA is a countries-driven, inclusive policy implementation action framework that convenes multiple sectors of the economy to work in complementarity for synergy to accelerate socioeconomic transformation and climate resilience through nature based agriculture as the strategic thrust engine.

It is a citizen's assembly, an inclusive implementation framework where everyone's skills and talent matters in connecting the dots. A coalition of the willing, of a people motivated to act NOT by the challenges but the opportunities Africa presents.

The premise of EBAFOSA is erected on selflessness and anchored on collectivism where each and every one of us has a part to play – individually as well as through the institutions we represent – towards realization of this desirable end where each and every one directly benefits in the process through what we call Innovative Volunteerism. With Innovative Volunteerism what counts most is not who knows you but your passion and commitment to drive transformational change through sustainable agriculture led clean energy powered industrialization



Innovative Volunteerism is not Blind optimism. It's already happening across the continent. From the coastlines of Nigeria, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Togo, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa to the savannahs of Cameroon, DRC in Central Africa to the highlands of Kenya where we are having this mindset change discussion, and neighboring Tanzania and to the Matoka hills of Uganda; to the savannahs of Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia, EBAFOSA through harnessing the spirit of innovative volunteerism, is generating waves of progress and transforming the narrative across Africa.

In DRC, a group of graduate youths have channeled their skills, networks and capital to optimize the cassava value chain. These young people are using clean energy to process cassava, into flour, packaging for sell to higher value markets. With this integration, the youth generate up to \$4,000 as weekly income, translating to \$16,000 monthly and \$196,000 annual income.

In Nigeria through the EBAFOSA Framework premised on the spirit of innovative volunteerism mobilized youth groups have volunteered their skills and partner with farmer cooperatives with the aim of developing EbA farming and expanding reach of EbA actions in Nigeria. This farm is being linked to markets and other commercial value chains to increase earnings. Over 1,000 youth are currently engaged

In connecting Policy dots,, innovative volunteerism has enabled Kenya to start merging implementing of various policies for coherence & synergy towards actualizing the Big 4. This is happening through the Kenya EBAFOSA

Inter Agency Policy Task Force hosted under the Ministry of Agriculture. For instance, we are having implementation of the Climate Smart Agriculture Strategy, being connected to the National Industrialization Policy, the health policy, relevant provisions of the finance Act 2017 (specifically exemptions on inputs for manufacture of pesticides) to put in place a joint plan of action for local manufacture and use of organic fertilizers & pesticides. This is hastening realization of 3 of the Big 4 - food security, health & manufacturing.

To unlock a regional market & drive demand for Africa's agro-produce, both fresh & processed, EBAFOSA is supporting countries introduce an "EBAFOSA compliance" standard. To be applied across the 40 EBAFOSA countries, This standard is the start of consolidating the continental food market valued at over \$150 billion dollars. This is how we will create the jobs for our youth & combat poverty in our homes.

Finance is another critical area. Through leveraging on the principle of cooperatives and the risk diversification they provide, EBAFOSA is connecting the dots to decentralize affordable market driven financing for clean energy systems to create agro-industries – the engines of wealth creation. For example, right here in Kenya, EBAFOSA has provided a convening platform where a farmer's cooperative – e-farm cooperative - is working with a clean energy firm – Epicentre Africa – to develop flexible & affordable clean energy financing products for cooperative members so they can acquire equipment like solar driers, solar powered irrigation etc. and cut post-harvest losses, expand production & earn more. Through this connection of the dots, farmers will make more money to contribute more to the benefit of the cooperative. Clean energy firm will expand its clientele base hence revenue.

Climate-wise, carbon is being mitigated. This is a win-win for people, economy & planet.

These are just a few examples to show that the formula to engendering an inclusive Africa and ensuring collective progress and prosperity is on the move. Such pockets of success are a clarion call and an encouragement for us to build on them and create full scale solutions. And it is our voluntary, but targeted complementary actions that will establish these enablers.

And let us not despise ourselves. As the African proverb goes – “if you think you are too small to make a difference, you haven’t spent the night with a mosquito”. If we don’t despise ourselves, our collective actions will move mountains. EBAFOSA provides you with that opportunity to make a difference now and into the future.

A difference like that been made by Muhammed Taal in the Gambia. Who after years 14 years in Europe doing different jobs to survive returned home in 2000 with little to show. He tried to use his skills to build up his assets by starting composition production. Now, thanks to his skills in making compost fertilizer, and the convening platform to gainfully engage his skills provided by EBAFOSA, Mr. Taal has partnered with livestock farmers to harvest manure & groundnut farmers to harvest shells and is using these as raw material to produce bio-fertilizer for sell. Through the EBAFOSA online e-commerce platform, Mr. Taal is being connected to a market across the Gambia. This is further strengthened by the EBAFOSA compliance standard

which recommends bio-fertilizer use not only in the Gambia, but across 40 EBAFOSA countries in Africa. Just like that, this connecting the dots is set to ensure Mr. Taal, a once hopeless man before, sets out to supply fertilizer across Africa. He is also training youth to replicate this success in his country.

It's a story of young St Kizito High School in Uganda who are developing practical skills in briquette production, EBA & smart agriculture and waste management but is also supplementing technical skills with the Business / Entrepreneurial training. This initiative successfully transformed St, Kizito High School, from use of firewood to use of their fuel briquettes saving up to 7 trucks of firewood per term and 21 trucks per year. This youth are the future of tomorrow

Talking of the future, In the words of a famous African proverb, *"where you will sit when you are old shows where you stood in youth"*.

I believe you will agree with me that your ideas can spark creativity & drive entrepreneurial opportunities. You will agree with me that you are the center piece of this civilization we intend to build through innovative volunteerism.

As the biggest stakeholders of Africa's future, dreaming, and dreaming big for Africa is what all of you should do. And don't dare stop at your dreams – arise from slumber, roll up your, create the dreams and make them happen. You are endowed by our creator with inherent capacity to dream and create your dreams. And by so doing, take leadership in transforming Africa to be

at the apex of global development where it ought to be. The message is simple. It is time to passionately engage in innovative volunteerism.

Which is what I am calling you to embrace and act on today. Package your competences and dreams, whatever they may be, – be they in science, in history, in engineering, in the performing arts, in politics, in entrepreneurship of any field - towards the shared objective of complementing the actualization of sustainable agro-industrialization in Africa.

“What will I gain right away” you may ask?

Through volunteering your skills, knowledge and resources at your disposal towards this bigger goal of industrializing Africa’s agriculture, you get to network, meet and interact with industry leaders. You showcase your skills, get mentored to refine them and earn practical hands on experience that positions you competitively in the labour markets. Let this never Give Up attitude energize all of us. That we can through innovative volunteerism, simultaneously develop ourselves and our continent.

An Optimist in Chief

And that is why I am an optimist and will always remain one. The world may seem to be in a terrible mess today, but what I have learned has shown me that there is hope. Hopelessness destroys the will to live. It is only by holding onto hope, and promoting hope in others, that we can change Africa and the world.

## My Story

I was not born into wealth and opportunity. I grew up herding goats in my village and the only hope was the inspiration from my parents that with hard work and perseverance everyone's dreams are valid. I went to school without shoes but the inspiration was simple- with hard work combined with passion and perseverance there a better tomorrow.

When I finished university, I stayed for 1 year volunteering to gain skills and through perseverance; I won a scholarship to study at the University Nottingham in the UK

and later on went to Harvard University Kennedy School of Government to pursue an Executive Education on Climate Change and Energy Policy Making. Better little than too little, I made effort to get the little.

This experience taught me a lot that I share with you today. First is, never be afraid to dream big. But dreaming is not enough, to achieve anything, you must apply Discipline and Consistency every day with set goals. You must plan every day. Work hard every day. Working really hard is key. Third, never forget that how much you have is what you do with what you have. Finally, don't just aspire to make a living- Always aspire to make a difference. It is now the turn for all the African youths to make their own effort to get their own little. All of you here today have the blessing of an education – and knowledge is power. Use your knowledge and your pens to promote

hope and change Africa and the world. Write about Africa. Tweet about Africa.

Making Africa Truly Great

*God is no respecter of persons, while he favourably gave Africa the resource, Africans must work against many odds*

I have had someone joke – God must have been in a very good mood when He created Africa. As someone who has spent some time in other continents, I attest. From a strategic position symmetrically about the equator, Africa boasts of not only the best weather all year round, but is favourably positioned to tap into the most fundamental source of energy globally – the sun. When we talk of the basic factor of production – fertile lands, Africa holds 65% of the global arable land. Talk of rivers, seas, lakes, captivating sceneries, diverse exciting wildlife – it is all here. This is in addition to the tremendous, seemingly infinite mineral wealth in the continent. It is our responsibility to erase the shame that is the paradox of desperate lack amidst plenty that has now become almost synonymous to Africa. Innovative Volunteerism is the formula. Let's apply it together.

As scripture underscores "iron sharpeneth iron". Innovative Volunteerism bestows upon each of us, an opportunity & duty to use what we have in our areas of enterprise as premium for targeted alliance building. Where the aim is enhancing & buttressing the capacity of our fellow brothers & sisters and neighbours so we can jointly engage in the catalytic area to collectively build

wealth for our countries and continent. The priority and tangible areas of engagement being the EBAFOSA pillars.

As we do this we know that the task ahead is great indeed, and heavy is the responsibility; and yet it is a noble and glorious challenge – a challenge which calls for the courage to dream, the courage to believe, the courage to dare, the courage to do, the courage to envision, the courage to work, the courage to achieve – to achieve the highest excellencies and the fullest greatness of man. Dare we ask for more in life? ” Kwame Nkrumah Address to the National Assembly. 12 June 1965. Do not look at your circumstances but at the glaring opportunities that our collective action in exercise of Innovative Volunteerism presents. Why because by crawling, a child learns to stand. That having witnessed the effectiveness of innovative volunteerism, and the glaring opportunities to tap into, we resolve to act with determination. To learn from the past experiences and refine our actions to apply innovative volunteerism more effectively. Innovative Volunteerism, is how we can reshape the development of the African continent. Yes, it is possible and our collective efforts will make it so.

Distinguished colleague’s ladies and gentlemen, Chinua Achebe once said, “when we gather together in the moonlight village ground, it is not because of the moon. Everyman can see it in his own compound. Rather we come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so”. In here, we gather as kinsmen - the sons and daughters of Africa. And we do so to leverage on team spirit, the power of togetherness and harness what we have to accelerate actualization of shared imperatives of food security, jobs for our youth and expand our economies & combat climate change. This is the underlying premise that should energize all of us to drive transformational change with energy & passion. This is what Innovative Volunteerism is



about. This is how we can reshape the development of the African continent. This is how we can start the mindset change paradigm shift to truly drive transformational change for ourselves and those yet to be born. Yes it is possible and our collective efforts will make it so.

And as we do so, we should learn from the mindset of the king of the jungle – the lion. Which, regardless of the economy of the jungle it has never and will never succumb to eating grass. That's just it's nature. Similarly, we can never succumb to purported socioeconomic challenges because we have the solutions. And it is against our very nature not to apply them. Let this mindset guide us as we vigorously, with our hearts & minds, engage in Innovative Volunteerism. No succumbing to challenges – just overcoming them.

And for us to do it so, we must learn from the hardworking and selfless spirit of ants which demonstrate the true spirit of Innovative Volunteerism. And for us to do it so, we must apply to ourselves the very lessons where we can selflessly spur ourselves to action and unlock what is worth more than what finances can achieve. We cannot therefore recoil from collectivism to individualism. Let us use what we have to galvanize actions that can win the future for ourselves and for those yet to be born. We Must therefore usher ourselves to Action

1. If there is a mother who cannot feed her new-born child with the proper food to live beyond the age of five, that should matter to us. If it matters to us we MUST usher ourselves to action.
2. If there is an Unemployed youth whose skill could be tapped to drive the agro value chain for jobs and food security that should matter to us. If it matters to us we MUST usher ourselves to action

By ushering ourselves to Action through the spirit of innovative volunteerism, we can ensure that Africa will never again experience the fear of want or

need! The future is in our hands and we have everything it takes to shape it for the collective benefit of all. Let us March forward in our collective strength and seize the moment!