

**LECTURE BY H.E PAUL KAGAME, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF RWANDA, TO THE OXFORD-CAMBRIDGE CLUB
OF NIGERIA**

Lagos, 10TH November 2012

- ✚ Mr Akinfela Akoni, President of the Oxford-Cambridge Club of Nigeria;**
- ✚ Members of this distinguished Club;**
- ✚ Distinguished Guests, ladies and gentlemen;**

I would like to thank you for inviting me to join you tonight - this is my first visit to Lagos - and I am pleased it is to be part of this distinguished gathering to share thoughts on how Africa can be more relevant in today's world.

Let me make two points at the very outset. First, Africa today has the opportunity to play its rightful role in the global arena. But to do so requires the continent to speak with one voice and to be competitive in all aspects, which in turn demands radical socio-economic transformation.

Second, as the subject of our discussion this evening suggests, Africa will do this when its people lead dignified lives and take full charge of their development agenda.

For this to happen, African countries need a new kind of leadership – one that has a vision for the country and the continent as a whole, a passion and commitment for its rapid development, as well as the well-being of its people.

The transformational leadership that will lead to Africa's prosperity and ensure its relevance must be one that is confident, assertive and innovative, and committed to promoting and defending the continent's interests. Above all, it should be prepared to seek solutions from within the philosophies and practices of our societies to various challenges that we face, and develop ideas to propel our countries forward. Sometimes, this might require going beyond the conventional and embracing the unorthodox.

It should be clear, however, that no individual leader or country acting alone will achieve a continent-wide qualitative change and play a significant global role.

That can only come about if our leadership seek and promote cooperation across Africa on a wide range of issues.

✚ Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

The fact that we are speaking about the need for change and the sort of agents who can bring it about is admission that Africa has not lived up to expectations and its full potential. The question, then, is: What do we need to do to reverse this situation? In the words of an eminent Nigerian, “we must first find out when the rain started beating us”.

Africa is not where it should be, not because of a lack of resources or human capital. Indeed if anyone had any doubts about the intellectual and entrepreneurial potential of the continent, they need only to look at those present in this room. As for enterprise, there are fewer greater than Nigerians.

The issue has been that we still do not have enough leaders across a variety of fields with ideas and practices to change our societies, the capacity to mobilise our people, and vision and drive to spur innovation and competitiveness.

Of course, Africa has had leaders – some of them great – over the last fifty years of independence. But despite the liberation and post-independence ideals, visions were only partially realised and Africa lost decades in terms of much needed cohesion and development.

To be fair, Africa's shortcomings cannot be entirely attributed to its leaders. Other factors, including external ones, such as inherited colonial structures that were not always relevant and external control of the development processes, contributed to the situation.

In the last two decades, Africa has begun to move again and entered a new phase. We are no longer looking to the outside for solutions to internal issues because home-grown ideas provide the answer, not only for development but also for the restoration of our dignity. That means change because the status quo has proved unsatisfactory.

Now, change of any sort is a journey into the unknown and unacceptable conditions alone do not provide enough drive to venture there.

And yet anyone driving change should bring along all the people with them. Using practices and beliefs that people identify with can help remove the fear and make them embrace the change, own and even build on it.

The collected, accumulated wisdom resulting from both the value system and participation has the effect of making people shareholders in the enterprise that is their country. As you all know, shareholders want and expect good dividends.

This is the source of home-grown ideas. They emanate from what the people collectively know and practice, and their power to drive change comes from this fact.

Of course, those who have always treated us as followers rather than leaders in our own right will want to halt the development of such home-grown ideas. Some will do so out of sheer ignorance. More often than not, however, they will disrupt us with subversive intent.

But this should not deter us because as we all know, success built on internally-generated ideas breeds confidence and fosters dignity.

Let me illustrate with the practical experience of Rwanda. In Rwanda we have consciously drawn from our history and culture ideas to drive our social, political and economic development for the simple reason that they work.

In the aftermath of the genocide in 1994, Rwanda was faced with a huge problem. Considering the large number of perpetrators, the need to give victims justice as well as restore social harmony, conventional political and justice systems were totally inadequate for the task. So we opted for Gacaca, a traditional conflict resolution mechanism, which in a decade tried close to two million cases at a small fraction of the US two billion dollars it cost the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to try only sixty cases.

But the significance of Gacaca goes beyond numbers of cases and their cost. It also addressed the key issues of justice and reconciliation. And because it was the first home-grown solution successfully applied to a seemingly

intractable problem, it inspired and empowered Rwandans to seek and use similar initiatives for broader national development.

Its success catalysed the generation of ideas and values crucial to national development – resilience, self-reliance, confidence and social cohesion.

Most important, it restored Rwandans’ dignity and pride in our cultural values as a source of remedies to current challenges, innovation and approaches to development.

Similarly, the Government of Rwanda initiated the Girinka (one cow per poor household) programme adapted from the traditional Rwandan solidarity practice of giving each other a cow as a pact of friendship and support in the event of misfortune or dire need. In its modern application, Girinka addresses several issues at once – improved nutrition, income generation and increased agricultural productivity.

Similarly, the government advanced fertilisers to crop farmers to boost production.

This initiative, together with other poverty-reduction measures, has contributed to the reduction of poverty by 12%, from 56.9% to 44.9% between 2005 and 2010 and raised one million people or 10% of the population out of poverty.

🌍 Ladies and Gentlemen;

What works internally may have application to intra-African situations, particularly as we focus on greater cooperation and integration, trade and investment in order to keep up with the emerging and the traditional strong economies. This is what will guarantee the individual and collective strength of our countries and contribute to our relevance.

To take one example from East Africa, as a result of the economic integration of the five member states of the East African Community, the region's total trade with the rest of the world more than doubled between 2005 and 2010, rising from 17.5 billion dollars to 37 billion dollars. Foreign Direct Investments also rose from 683 million dollars in 2005 to 1.7 billion dollars in 2011.

This approach of greater cooperation also extends to peace and stability, and that is why today, African leaders are investing in continent-generated solutions to issues of political stability and conflict resolution. The results so far are encouraging.

Somalia is re-emerging as a viable country. Sudan and South Sudan are on the road to peaceful co-existence. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, regional efforts hold the greatest promise of an enduring resolution to the conflict there.

In conclusion, I submit to you that Africa's position and relevance in the world in an increasingly competitive global environment will be ensured by a leadership and people that refuse to be second best and that stand up for their shared interests.

This requires a mindset focused on dignity and merit-individually and collectively – and by drawing from our culture and history as inspiration and source of solutions to our development needs.

And for Africa to have a bigger voice in world affairs, it is imperative that the momentum the continent has gained is maintained and even fast-tracked. That duty falls on those in charge of our countries at different levels today, but more so to those who will pick up the baton from them. They have no other option.

I thank you for your kind attention.