

**LECTURE to mark the 10th Year Anniversary of Mr Elikem Kuenyehia
returning to Africa and the Establishment of the law firm, Oxford &
Beaumont**

**The Oxford and Cambridge Club, London
Pall Mall
Thursday 31 July 2014**

**“African Decade, Changing Perspectives, Increasing
Opportunities”**

Mr Elikem Kuenyehia, Founder and Managing Partner, Oxford & Beaumont;

Members of The Oxford and Cambridge Club (London, Ghana, Nigeria and
Worldwide);

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

First, I would like to thank Elikem for the invitation to deliver this Lecture. Elikem, in his own inimitable way, approached me in a manner which I could not refuse. Once I finally acquiesced, the next hurdle to surmount was “how does one do justice to this intriguing topic?”

Secondly, I stand before you in this Drawing Room at the rather prestigious Oxford & Cambridge Club, London in Pall Mall – no doubt some of you will know how passionate I am with regards to Oxbridge alumni movement generally, and Nigeria in particular! It is therefore with great honour and pleasure to be delivering this Lecture today at the Oxford and Cambridge Club in London.

Finally, to the business of the day – African Decade, Changing Perspectives, Increasing Opportunities.

AFRICAN DECADE

The last decade in Africa has been very interesting indeed, if not enthralling. Further, the Continent is in constant flux where no one knows or can predict tomorrow (literally). Just before finalizing this Paper, the latest episode to afflict Africa is Ebola – meandering itself effortlessly across several countries like The Nile. I really did not have time to dwell on this latest epidemic however it serves as another example of the forever evolving Continent we call Home! It is also interesting to note that, yet again, the decisive position by the relevant Nations to combat this epidemic is not made public.

We have seen the expansion in a number of the traditional sectors in Africa including Oil and Gas, Banking, Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and Tourism. However, we cannot but remark on the exponential growth in new sectors such as (i) Music featuring African artists who can now be proclaimed as “International Artists” and whose music can be heard over the Tannoy at the High Brow shops on Oxford Street (just a stone’s throw away from here), (ii) the booming Nollywood film industry in Nigeria which uses low cost digital filmmaking and editing techniques to catapult real life stories to the living rooms or electronic devices of millions – by the way, Nollywood is now a USD250m a year industry in just over a Decade and (iii) of course, the Telecoms industry with a combined 700 million GSM subscribers across the Continent in just over a Decade.

You will pardon me to illustrate the African Decade by focusing briefly on the phenomenal growth in the Telecoms industry in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, there are four main Operators in the GSM space. According to the Regulator, in 2002, the total subscriber base was approximately 2.2 million. Today, the subscriber base stands at almost 130 million! The Teledensity, which is the number of telephone connections for every hundred individuals living within an area (the Teledensity varies widely across the nations and also between urban and rural areas within a country). In 2001, the Teledensity for Nigeria was 1.89% whilst today, the figure is a staggering 91%.

Finally on the figures, the Percentage Contribution of the Telecoms Industry to Nigeria's GDP between 2001-2013 makes interesting reading as well. In 2001, the figure was 0.62% whilst as at 2013, the figure was 7.76%.

Admittedly, the Telecom industry is only one Sector. However, I hope the above figures demonstrate the type of growth that can be achieved in Africa (that is of course, if you happen to be in the right place, at the right time).

Challenges

There are, of course, Challenges in Africa (for the discerning mind, a "Challenge" is indeed the euphemism for dealing with the "African Factor"). Actually, on my various journeys across Africa, I came to realize that the "African Factor" is referred to differently across the Continent but essentially, means the same. Some of you will be familiar with the phrases – "Naija factor", "Ghanaian factor", "So Kenyan", or even, the "Lusaka Swagger"!

In Africa, we have Challenges of Corruption, Security, Infrastructure, Power and Leadership (to name but a few) which are pervasive across Africa to varying degrees.

Corruption is a widely used word in Africa. We have various indices including, for example, the Transparency Index, purporting to measure the level of corruption or Governance in any country. However, there is no acceptable definition. I raise this point because what is permitted in one society can be abhorrent in others (or, indeed, *vice versa*).

Security - whilst the African Nations appear to have small scale crime under control, large scale Security issues are now very much on the increase. A casual wander to the Mall in Nairobi or a relaxing weekend on the Eastern coast of Kenya may leave you with more than your shopping or R&R to contend with.

Of course, the burning topic on everyone's tongue today is Boko Haram and the Chibok girls. I think it would be remiss of me not to dwell on this great Challenge affecting Nigeria, and if not curtailed quickly, will soon be Africa's Challenge.

This latest Challenge concerns the abduction of 276 girls from Chibok (a town in Northeast Nigeria) by the Islamists group, Boko Haram (literally, “Western or Non-Islamic Education is a sin”).

Recently, the President of Nigeria admitted that the Nigerian government should have dealt with the communication issues in respect of the abduction of the girls from Chibok promptly and vigorously. Unfortunately, the delay has perpetuated the negative image and reputation Nigeria enjoys internationally.

Ms Malala Yousafzai, the young Education Activist, was reported to have visited Nigeria recently – let us hope her visit will speed up the return of our girls.

Infrastructure - with the help of the Continent’s new best friend, China, thankfully, Infrastructure projects are on the ascendency. From the Great Tikka Highway in Nairobi, to the renovation of the National Theatre in Accra or the rehabilitation of the mines in the Copperbelt, Zambia, we have seen an unprecedented level of development in the last Decade alone.

Power is everything. Power remains a perennial problem across Africa. In 2000–2006, the electric power consumption per capita (KWh per capita) of South Africa was 4,847 whilst that of Ethiopia was 34.4. Today, the figures are 4,604 and 52 respectively. Compared to developed countries, Africa KWh per capita figures are generally in the hundreds whilst those for the developed countries are in the thousands.

Leadership is perhaps the crux of our Challenges to date! Our Leaders must first recognize that to Lead, is to Serve! Until we accept this basic prerequisite of leadership, I am afraid that venturing towards talking about accountability of our Leaders will be futile.

Africa has had a few great leaders, and perhaps the greatest leader of all, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. However, there are many not so great (I have no doubt each of us could name a few if pressed to do so). Our leaders have come from all works or strata of life. However, there seems to be a remarkable void from Oxbridge despite the fact that records show that Africans have been regularly attending

Over the Decade, I have had the opportunity to visit a number of African countries – I will not dwell on the arduous journeys taken to arrive at my destination other than to say, I was always relieved to be able to make that call home! These brief sojourns across the Continent have afforded me great opportunities to study the business environment, cultures and perhaps more importantly, the people. To deal with Africa, there has to be a concerted effort breaking down existing barriers based on ethnic, cultural or religious grounds. With a population of almost 1.1 billion spread across 58 countries, the business gurus amongst us will say this is a healthy population to work with. In order to tap into these vast resources, we need to connect the Continent. Our Pan-African and Regional Bodies – AU, ECOWAS, EAC, SADC etc must become more effective and purposeful in uniting the Continent.

The desire to return Home can be summarized as the quest to make a difference. In this regard, I often remark that to make a difference, you need to do one of the two things – either “Change” or “Create”.

To Change or Create, one must be disciplined. In fact, to win, you need to be very disciplined. I will use a cricketing analogy here to further illustrate the point. In a game of cricket, there is an art to shinning the cricket ball – depending on the shine on the ball, this will help or hinder the bowler. Interestingly, no more than two out of the 11 members of the team are “shiners”! If we were to draw a parallel with Africa, each member of the team wants to be the “shiner” resulting in utter chaos! Individuality over Team! Unfortunately, discipline is one life skill we seem to be lacking in Africa today.

Increasing Opportunities

Notwithstanding the Challenges, Africa continues to present increasing opportunities. However, to realize these opportunities, there is a need for concerted effort by Africans to align their thoughts, efforts and actions. Below are 10 suggested areas of opportunities to watch out for over the next Decade:

- (1) The current total Africa population is estimated at 1.1 billion. - this represents fantastic opportunity to mold the future particularly in the Telecommunications industry with data capabilities for the youth segment;
- (2) According to the World Bank, in 2000–2006 the average GDP per capita growth in Sub-Saharan Africa was 2.0%, up from –0.7% in 1990–1999. As at 2013, the figure is approximately 4.8% and it is worth remarking that a few of the countries such as Angola, Cote D’Ivoire, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania (to name a few) boasts one of the highest growth rates in Sub-Saharan Africa with each over 6%;
- (3) The Banking Sector continues to be an interesting sector of the Economy. We are seeing a number of Banking Groups moving from National to Regional, Pan-African and now, International banks;
- (4) Ultimately, Nigeria’s strength will be her Economy due to her rather large population. With the recent Rebasing of the Economy (GDP now, USD522.6 billion), there is huge potential for Nigeria on the global stage. This is further confirmed by the recent proclamation by the renowned economist, Jim O’Neill, that Nigeria, together with Mexico, Indonesia and Turkey, will be one of the next four emerging economic giant – the so called “**MINT**” countries;
- (5) Rwanda is currently in the 14th year of her Digital Vision 2020 plan to develop its Information and Communications Technology (ICT) capabilities to achieve full digitalization by 2020. Today, there are approximately 1.2 million internet users in a country with a population of 12 million people;
- (6) Kenya remains the hub for Regional Africa Offices of several International organizations and its latest tenant to reinforce its commitment to Kenya is none less than the United Nations;
- (7) Renewable and Sustainable Energy perhaps holds the key to resolving the Power issues in Africa. Entrepreneurial endeavours across the continent are seeing novel solutions being created to resolve power problems. This is notable in Tanzania where there are several indigenous companies focusing on making renewable and sustainable energy available to the masses particularly in rural areas;

- (8) The power of cultural industries to create jobs and wealth has been a focus of UNESCO, through its Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity. UNESCO has been in the forefront in helping African countries re-shape their policies to take cultural industries into consideration. The promotion of cultural industries also has been incorporated into the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). With this recognition, the Nollywood and Music industries will no doubt continue to present great opportunities going forward.
- (9) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) – Rwanda has promulgated specific legislation to enable the establishment of NGOs in her shores;
- (10) Chinafrica (the China Africa Think Tank) reported recently the strengthening of relationships between China and South Africa to build manufacturing opportunities. This final 'marriage of convenience' represents the last Bastion to be conquered by the Chinese in Africa.

Finally, I would like to close by emphasizing the need for all of us to either Change or Create (with the exceptional few who can achieve both in their lifetime) in order to further develop Africa.

We are here this evening to honour Elikem who has not only created a first class law firm in Ghana but indeed, changed the face of the legal profession in Ghana. In 2008 when my organization entered the Ghanaian market, there were only a handful of established law firms that could meet the needs of an international cross border transaction. Today, I am pleased to report that even Oxford & Beaumont will have to go through the normal tender process to secure any Brief!

A number of the great achievements we enjoy today – be it watching cricket at Lord's or admiring the Telford infrastructure projects across the UK or even following the Methodist movement, these were created by visionaries in the 18th Century. We all have a part to play and there is time to do your bit!

Thank you for your time.

Fela Akoni

31 July 2014