

**Education for Development: the African and
Rwandan Challenge**

**Remarks by H E Paul Kagame, President of the
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- ✚ Sir Muir Russell, Principal, University of Glasgow;
- ✚ Professor Peter Holmes, Pro-Vice Chancellor;
- ✚ Principals and Vice Chancellors of Scottish Universities;
- ✚ Professors, Students, and members of the wider community;
- ✚ Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am most sincerely grateful for the honour this great institution has bestowed on me by granting me an honorary degree of doctor of laws.

This recognition is particularly rewarding in the context of ongoing collaboration between the University of Glasgow and its sister Scottish institutions of higher learning and our country, Rwanda.

This partnership is also gathering strength at the time that we are making good progress in rebuilding our country after the tragedy of 1994.

On behalf of Rwandans, and on my own behalf, I express our heart-felt gratitude for your contribution in the expansion of our human resource base.

I also thank you very much for your kind invitation to share my views on the African and Rwandan challenges in building effective educational systems and processes for socioeconomic transformation.

- ✚ Distinguished Audience;

The backbone of every modern society is a healthy, educated, skilled and economically-engaged population.

Attaining this status requires an integrated education reflecting well-articulated primary, secondary and tertiary education and training that are, furthermore, aligned to national development needs.

Both the quantity and quality are equally critical – so is the question of teaching of science and technology, which is an integral part of an effective educational infrastructure.

Our challenge in Africa is that education is not yet an integrated enterprise.

For example, there remains a false notion that primary education is more important than other levels of education, a perspective that is widely propagated by the donor community which still exerts undue influence on education policies on our continent.

As previously noted, an effective educational system is one that values all levels including primary education that provides a critical foundation for life-long learning; the choice between levels serves no purpose.

The belief in “choices” has led to the neglect of institutions of higher learning – a factor that results in insufficient professionals, technicians and a lack of a strong artisan base.

The productivity and competitiveness of African businesses as well as effectiveness of public services are also compromised.

In this environment, expanding the pool of entrepreneurs, innovators and creators of wealth in small, medium and large enterprises becomes a monumental challenge.

A vicious cycle is produced by this insignificant investment in the right kind of education, thereby weakening the business sector and undermining the tax base, which in turn makes it much more difficult to raise revenue to spearhead economic growth and development.



✚ Colleagues and Friends

✚ Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Education, on its own, is no silver bullet.

The full impact of a skilled population can only be felt when education policy is integrated with the full spectrum of national development efforts.

This demands national ownership of development policies and effective capacities to implement them.

Focused development strategies as well as comprehensive education and training for realising these plans reinforce each other.

It is only then that education becomes fully integrated, produces a scientific and technological teaching base, and consistently addresses skills and competencies in line with the national development vision.

And it is also at this point that the human capital accumulated becomes effectively utilised for economic growth and development.

What is our situation in Rwanda?

We have substantially increased accessibility and affordability of primary education by eliminating tuition at this level.

We are now considering ways to improve accessibility of secondary education.

However, tertiary training remains a critical challenge.

The number of graduates and institutions that produce them have increased in the last thirteen years, but from a particularly low base of skill that was previously created by a single university since 1962.

Even at the current improved rate of graduations, it will take us a fairly long time to arrive at the international benchmark for sustainable development where at least ten percent of the population has a tertiary education.

Our development imperative requires that we rapidly acquire this critical skills base in the shortest time possible by applying all available options.

These include increasing our capacity to train larger numbers at home, and sending more Rwandans abroad for higher education, particularly in strategic fields of science and technology.

None of the above should imply or encourage chasing academic qualifications for the sake of it – rather, they must be carefully tailored to Rwanda's development needs.

Globally, we should not overlook the need to expand Rwanda's artisan skill base— and generally to promote technically-oriented skills while changing the mindset that views these occupations as a 'second-prize' to a university degree.

We also need to institute programs that build technical and vocational capacity through long-term apprenticeships – the sort of trainee systems at the core of well-developed human capital in present-day industrialized economies.

These technical and vocational skills are also the vital means through which communities empower themselves by entering the monetized economy and overcoming poverty.

Let me also note here that effective education policies and good practices are about inclusiveness.

In this respect, women constitute a critical dimension.

Indeed, the importance of gender parity in education for development cannot be overemphasized - equal access to education brings out the best talent from all human assets of a nation.

Exclusion of women and girls from education squanders more than half of national human capital and talent.

In Rwanda we believe very strongly that addressing this challenge requires that women play equal roles in leadership and decision-making at all national levels.

Significant progress continues to be made in this direction.

✚ Excellencies

✚ Ladies and Gentlemen

✚ Distinguished Guests

The solution to the skills shortage in Africa is not only to increase investment in education – we also have to tackle the problem of brain drain.

Recently, this issue has been turned on its head by the benefits accrued in terms of remittances sent back home by African immigrants – an important contribution to national revenues that cannot be ignored.

However, the numbers of African professionals migrating to Europe or North America in search of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities keep increasing.

This is not by design.

I am convinced that many members of the African Diaspora would like nothing more than to pursue their professions in their countries and regions.

Our responsibility as leaders is to understand why they do not do so, and tackle the underlying causes - not least because we are forced to fill the vacuum created by African brain drain, with expensive but not necessarily effective, international technical assistance.

Retention strategy is very critical, and should be enhanced by improved governance in Africa and the institutionalised practice of merit-based promotion and reward.

✚ Excellencies;

✚ Ladies and Gentlemen

We are well aware of educational challenges on our continent, and in Rwanda.

We are determined to tackle and overcome them.

I take this opportunity to thank the Scottish Universities for contributing to this effort.

I understand that this University has recently established “the Glasgow Centre for International Development”, which brings together academics from all parts of the world to pursue teaching and research interests.

I encourage you to use this Centre to deepen the collaboration between African and Scottish knowledge institutions.

In this respect, I look forward to continued excellent relationship between the University of Glasgow and our country.

May God bless you all.