

**THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF SCHOLARSHIP:  
An Evening of Information Sharing About Scholarship Opportunities**

**OPENING ADDRESS BY**

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## **SALUTATIONS**

- Master of Ceremonies and Chair of the panel session **Dr Tendai Musindo**.
- The Scholarships Manager for Canon Collins Educational and Legal Assistance Trust, **Eva Lenicka**
- The Southern Africa Manager for Canon Collins Education and Legal Assistance Trust **Dr Gillian Attwood**.
  
- **Distinguished Panellists**
  - ❖ **Hon. Joanah Mamombe**  
Current scholar and Member of Parliament
  - ❖ **Lenin Tinashe Chisaira**  
Alumnus, Lawyer, writer, researcher and activist
  - ❖ **Vernon Murenje**  
Alumnus, Public health specialist at the I-TECH
  
- Canon Collins Scholarship Alumni and current students here present.
- Other distinguished guests here present.
- Ladies and gentlemen.

## INTRODUCTIONS

It is a great honour to have been asked to give a keynote address at this important occasion by Canon Collins Southern Africa on the theme “**The Transformative Power of Scholarship**”. I am indeed humbled to be standing before you as a product of Canon Collins and having experienced in my own way the transformative power of scholarship.

I am indeed gratified to be among the close to 3,000 people to have been supported to study at universities in the UK and South Africa since its inception in 1981. I studied for an MBA at Edinburgh Business School at Heriot-Watt University under the Canon Collins Scholarship and graduated in 2013. Studying for the MBA was one of the most transforming experiences of my life and laid the foundation for my current career and PhD studies.

### Where is Africa Today?

With **200 million** people of its total 1.3bn population aged between **15** and **24**, Africa has the youngest population in the world. Africa is the second largest continent by population (approx. **17%**) after Asia (**4.6bn, 60%**), and its share is forecasted to continue increasing to about **27%** by 2050. While its increasing population is in some cases regarded as an advantage due to the potential availability of a young workforce, it does present potential challenges that demand a new approach to economic development. A young population without opportunities is a time bomb that can precipitate into social unrest and civil strife. The post-independence Africa must, therefore, seek to achieve two important aspects:

1. Ensuring that its young population has access to quality education as espoused in Sustainable Development Goal 4.

2. Achieve and maintain economic growth rates that sustain work and entrepreneurial opportunities at levels that sufficiently absorb the skills coming out of our education systems.

To achieve these two broad objectives, two key elements are important, **Quality Education** and **Economically Useful Education**. Attention to these two aspects is very important because post-independence most countries maintained the same system that was primarily designed to serve a colonial state and only moved a step further to massify the same. In Zimbabwe for example despite achieving very high literacy rates in basic education, the health sector suffers a skills deficit of **95%** relative to OECD levels, this despite health being a basic need. On attaining independence, the focus was on massification of basic education without transforming it to serve the needs of a new independent state. It is thus not surprising that by content and quantity most of our programmes are still designed to create a typical native political administrator and at best a technical guy good enough to maintain existing systems rather than innovate around them.

### **Why Leaders Matter?**

The initial thrust when the Trust was founded in 1981 by anti-Apartheid activist, Canon John Collins was to equip South African and Namibian exiles with the skills and knowledge denied to them by Apartheid. Today the Trust has transformed itself to building communities, by focusing on developing future leaders through postgraduate scholarships.

The quest for a prosperous society has largely remained an elusive dream for most of our people. The stagnation and in some cases regression in most post-independence states in sub-Saharan Africa and indeed the larger part of Latin America has been a source of endemic conflict and endless political upheavals. One factor or variable that remains a key underpinning reason for the continued underdevelopment in these societies is **Leadership**.

May I first demystify that leadership is not a position. It is however expected that positions of any sort must be held by leaders. The mistaken assumption that leadership is equivalent to positions has seen many contestations around positions rather than on ideas and competing visions on how our societies can better achieve their aspirations.

The past and in some cases present heroes of our societies have largely revolved around civic and political leaders. This has crowded out the most critical of leaders that Africa needs today, that is leaders in community development. When will heroes in business, health, engineering and technology define what our young people aspire to be in life?

Zimbabwe today is in the middle of a purely mediaeval disease outbreak. For a society that boasts of very high literacy rates and a sufficiently educated population, this situation is rather unfortunate. What however is required is not awareness campaigns, but rather it is fixing of the water and sanitation problem, that has become synonymous with most post-independent states struggling with increased urbanisation. A very different community leader with very different expertise is required from a political one to solve this serious community problem. One thus can be a leader in community health, engineering and technology for example and still have equally the same impact. You can be a leader without a position.

### **What is the Role of Scholarship in Africa's Development?**

As Albert Einstein said, ***"We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them."*** Scholarship gives you that opportunity to experience other societies and learn from their norms, values and practices. Without the cross-pollination of ideas, it is unimaginable that any society can sustain its own civilisation. Inbreeding of thoughts, ideas and practices and continued reinforcement of the same is in my view the biggest and foremost hindrance to the progress of Africa. Those who have an appreciation of

reproductive systems know very well that one of the consequences of inbreeding of any sort is the deterioration of genetic material and ultimate demise of any species. Africa without cross-pollination with the world is a continent under threat of extinction.

Post World War 2, very few countries and territories have moved from poor to developed nation status, and ironically all of them are in Asia. Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Chinese Territory of Taiwan and now China itself are notable if not the only ones. The single most distinguishing feature in the transformation of these countries is their outlooking approach as evidenced by a massive deliberate scholarship programme to develop leaders with a global perspective in critical fields. In 1957 when Ghana gained its independence, it was relatively well developed compared with other Asian countries equally under British rule. In 1960 Ghana had a GDP per capita of **USD183** compared to South Korea's **US\$158.2**, Japan's **US\$479** and Singapore's **US\$427.9**. Fast forward to today; Ghana has largely remained stuck in poverty and under development with a GDP per capita of **USD1,641.5** compared to South Korea's **US\$29,742.8**, Japan's **US\$38,428.1** and Singapore's **US\$57,714.3**. This is despite Ghana having vast natural resources compared to these Asian tigers which hardly have any natural resources. At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had a GDP per capita of **US\$932** and was relatively more developed than China which had a GDP Percapita of **US\$309**. Today the story is much different with Zimbabwe still stuck at GDP Percapita of **US\$1,079.6** compared to China's GDP Per Capita of **US\$8,827.0**.

Many other examples I can give of how Africa has been left behind. The purpose of this presentation is not to magnify how we have largely failed to meet the aspirations of our people, but rather to motivate and show that it is possible. Scholarship is one of the keys in the very much necessary process of continuous development of new generations of leaders that will take our nations forward.

## How Can Scholarship Transform Individuals?

One of the most difficult personal development questions people face is where and what to study? After overcoming this hurdle, the single and greatest threat to fulfilling one's dream is how to finance their studies. In the absence of viable and sustainable funding options scholarships largely remain the only way one can fulfil their dreams. The most important part, however, is not the degree certificate that one gets after the end of their gruelling programme, rather it is the world class experience of interacting with other cultures and the cross-pollination of ideas, values and practices. You are not only transformed intellectually but become part of a large global network of intellectuals in your domain of influence.

Global education and experience open up a whole world of opportunities for one to fulfil their dream. You become more outward looking and perceive and analyse things from a global perspective. The first and simple thing that scholarship does to you is that it increases your confidence. When I went to interviews for my current position, I was the youngest and least experienced among a pool of other probably more experienced individuals, but confidence and intellectual clarity on what is needed for the job carried the day. My own experience is that scholarship has much more impact when you come back and use your skills where they are required most. Light shines most where it's darker.

The argument by some has always been education is education, and hence international education is over glorified. Let me submit to you that education is more than textbook knowledge which one can, in any case, get at the click their phone button today courtesy of technology. Education is the total package of experiences that shape our thought patterns, values, principles and attitudes. During my study in the UK, one of the most transforming experiences was my approach to materialism and what really matters in life.

Professionally wise the MBA transformed me into a close to complete package and has availed me the opportunity to sit on a number of boards where my professional knowledge has been invaluable. Without the MBA which I studied courtesy of the scholarship from Canon Collins, I would have never had the opportunity to fulfil my dream of studying for a PhD in Economics with a top University in the world. The experience of being in a country where one can see and experience transformation in practice in a very different cultural and political context has been invaluable and shows the power of scholarship in opening up doors that will lead to many other opportunities.

The world today is becoming more and more competitive and is increasingly demanding globally competitive human capital to solve local challenges. The decision to further one's studies more so in the international domain is one of the most important decisions any young person can make.

I am indeed heartened by the interest that potential future scholars here today and many others around the country have shown in studying abroad under the Canon Collins Southern Africa Scholarship programme. Should you succeed to be among the 100 or so scholars that Canon Collins support annually you should always remember why this scholarship was started in the first place, that is, To develop leaders that will influence development in their communities. It is not about you, but about others. Your country needs you and your community needs you. I wish you all the best of success as you endeavour to join this great family called Canon Collins.

**Ndatenda, Siyabonga, I Thank You.**