

REPUBLIC OF KENYA
COUNTY GOVERNMENT OF KAKAMEGA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

**SPEECH BY H.E. WYCLIFFE AMBETSA OPARANYA, E.G.H., C.G.J.,
GOVERNOR KAKAMEGA COUNTY & CHAIR, COUNCIL OF
GOVERNORS DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONVENING ON INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO
RESEARCH EVIDENCE UPTAKE & USE IN AFRICA.**

**THURSDAY MAY 2, 2019 AT THE MOVENPICK HOTEL &
RESIDENCES**

The Principal Secretary, State Department for Vocational & Technical Training, Ministry of Education, Republic of Kenya, Dr Kevit Desai;

The Chair, Board of Directors, Partnership for Social & Governance Research (PASGR), Kenya, Prof Ernest Aryeetey;

The Executive Director, Partnership for Social & Governance Research (PASGR), Prof Tade Aina,

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my great pleasure to join you today in this important convening on innovative approaches to evidence uptake and use in Africa. I am informed that we have about 20 countries represented here today which makes this gathering one of its kind at this important juncture

in the history of our continent, Africa. Please feel at home among your brothers and sisters in Kenya.

Allow me to begin my thanking the organisers of the conference for inviting me and for considering me as a guest of honour to officially open this forum.

I am not entirely new to the excellent work that the Partnership for Social & Governance Research (PASGR), is doing in the continent. I have, on a previous occasion, joined and addressed one of their Utafiti Sera forums on social protection in June 2018, where I had a chance to share with other counties about my maternal and child health programme in Kakamega county.

So, when they contacted me to join you in this Africa-wide forum, I thought it would be a good opportunity reflect on some of the work we have done and how we can together as a continent move forward in transforming the lives of people through evidence informed policy and programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen;

Let me at this juncture provide some personal reflections as to why this convening is timely and relevant at this juncture in the development history of our continent and particularly our country Kenya. As some of you may be aware, I have spent over 17 years of my career as a public servant, starting as a member of parliament for Butere Constituency, then Kenya's Minister of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030 and now as governor, Kakamega county and chair of council of governors, the umbrella body that brings together Kenya's 47 devolved governments.

I am also the deputy party leader of one of the largest political parties in Kenya. These positions of leadership have given me first hand opportunity to experience the real development challenges facing our people and to be part of a new generation of leaders keen to transform the lives of our people.

I would like to highlight three of those challenges which I think are critical for the continent:

1. Youth unemployment

About 13% of the world's population lives in sub-Saharan Africa, with the number projected to double by 2055 when the global population will be around 10 billion. The youth in Africa constitute about 75% of the population. It is predicted that the youth population will reach 830 million by 2050 (ILO, 2016). While the youth can be a valuable resource for socioeconomic transformation and development, youth in Africa face significant economic challenges, with youth accounting for 60% of all unemployed in Africa. Consequently, youth employment is a top priority for Africa, requiring urgent and scalable innovative and sustainable solutions to the problems of inadequate, unsustainable and gender disparities in employment for youth our continent.

Solutions should include transformative and inclusive education that promotes the acquisition of both technical and soft skills. There is need for robust evidence if Africa is to achieve this transformation.

2. Changing governance systems and the need for inclusive, equitable development

One of the biggest challenges of 21st century development is a development marked by unimaginable inequity as seen in the rapid growth in the gap between the richest people in society and others. This often also takes a gender angle, with women being the most disadvantaged. The challenge is worse in Africa where most recent evidence suggest that 4 out of 10 most inequitable countries are in Africa. In 2015, world leaders committed to tackle inequity under Goal 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One way through which African countries have moved to tackle this challenge is through entrenchment of decentralisation and governance reforms.

Slowly and gradually, decentralization is gaining recognition as an effective way to give increasingly robust independent decision-making powers to local and/or regional governments in Africa. Although decentralisation is not new in Africa, deeper forms of it such as devolution is only now taking shape and thus will require researchers, policy makers and programme implementers to work closely together to generate and use evidence to assess progress; identify what can be done better; and what policies and programmes are worth scaling-up based on impact and or effectiveness. For African governments to increase impact of policies and programmes and to maximise use of limited resources to realise sustainable development goals, they need robust evidence.

3. Changing disease patterns and health and development needs of a growing population

The last challenge I would like to address briefly is one that is close to my heart and it at the heart of my government. This is the issue of changing disease patterns, health and development needs of Africa's growing population. It is no secret that most African countries are struggling to provide basic services for their populations. But it also a fact that we are making significant progress in a number of areas. To buttress my point, allow me to highlight some facts from the latest evidence on global disease burden published by the international medical journal *The Lancet*. The report shows that most deaths occurring in most of Africa are as a result of preventable causes such as communicable, new-born, nutritional, and maternal causes such as diarrheal diseases, lower respiratory infections, and protein-energy malnutrition. The study also highlights the growing burden of non-communicable diseases. Again these challenges require concerted stakeholder efforts to address with the opportunity for better outcomes if these efforts are guided by strong scientific evidence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Having provided a background of the some of the key challenges facing our continent and for which evidence is pertinent in resolving, let to turn to some personal experiences that speaks to this issue.

Before I initiated the transformative Kakamega County maternal and neonatal health programme, there was need to have a sound basis for a policy direction based on facts on the ground.

Back in 2013 when we took over the management of health services, our Country had some of the worst health indicators that painted a grim picture for a population seriously weighed down by poverty and

broken health services infrastructure. Mothers and children were the most vulnerable.

The maternal mortality then was 880 per 100,000 live births. This was double the national figure which was 440 per 100,000. We established that most mothers were dying for the simple reason that they were not delivering in hospitals. Most of them were delivering in the hands of traditional birth attendants. Poverty was identified as one of the key reasons they were not going to hospitals. They could neither afford hospital fees nor transport cost to the health facilities. Unfortunately, delivering in the hands of traditional birth attendants meant that the mothers did not attend clinic and the babies missed their immunizations. These facts were too troubling to allow any further delay on our part.

We launched the programme in 2014. But after several years of experience in management of the programme, we realised that its sustainability was at risk. We eventually decided to anchor it in law in order to outlive political transition.

Wide experience in public life and solid networks developed in the course of the developing a high profile and rich career comes with far-reaching benefits including enhanced resource mobilisation capacity and peer support in pushing a particular agenda or policy direction.

Ladies and gentlemen;

There are many examples I could give in other sectors I have successfully engaged national and county government leadership as well as development partners to find a common ground for policy

development towards achieving specific goals be they economic or otherwise.

As I conclude, let me say how pleased I am to note that this important issue of scientific research and its use in Africa's development is receiving the much needed attention.

However, as researchers conduct research aimed at addressing these needs of the people, they ought to recognise that governments want to solve the problems and require practical, concrete and applicable evidence.

It is therefore critical that researchers identify the most innovative ways to overcome demand and supply side barriers to evidence use and work closely with governments in particular as the recognised voices of the people to meet the needs of the electorates.

I sincerely trust that you will find time to visit some of our renowned tourist sites in and around the city before you go back home. With our devolved system of government in place, I am certain that our people in the devolved units will also be eager to welcome you. So feel at home to visit us in Kakamega County.

With these remarks, it's now my great pleasure to declare the international **"Convening on Innovative Approaches to Research Evidence Uptake & Use in Africa"** officially open.

Thank you