**THE NEW VISTA OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP: ENGAGING THE UNENGAGED HANDS IN AFRICA**

**By**

**Mr. Ethan Musilini**

May I start by thanking Prof. A.U. Nnoyelu and the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of this University for inviting me, the Vice Chancellor for the permission, and all the organizers and the benefactor of this lecture series for the opportunity to be in Nigeria and stand before this great assembly. I am indeed delighted by the near presidential treatment which I have received from the Airport to my hotel and the wonderful quality time I spent with the family of the Chairman of the Zik lecture series committee who took me to church yesterday. Nigerians are indeed great and good people.

**My impression of Nigerians**

When first I visited Nigeria about 8years ago, precisely in Lagos, I had a lifetime experience of traffic jam that was as long as a mile. Some people were hugging each other as if it was normal. Infact, in Uganda if such a jam occurs, people jump over the bus, but I could not do the same. I liken that to what I saw as I was coming down to Awka from Enugu. The road was very bad, I could see some Nigerians in very big cars and some looking quite hungry and sad, and I think of a country at cross-road, a blessed Nation, and a Nation that still has a long way to go. However, I also see the goodness of Zik's spirit of Nationalism, and a determination to truly move forward and claim truly her place as the leader of Africa.

During that first visit to Nigeria, which was on the invitation of British council, we were at Eko Hotel in Lagos and there was this lady, she was walking tall. And I stopped her and said: *excuse me madam, you walk with such grace and elegant, are you a manager here?* She said: *No,* I *just clean around.* I was amused and amazed and was like waooh, I like that. So, during that training, a broadcaster in South Africa made a profound comment, which I have been sharing in the audiences in Uganda. He said that Nigerians walk without apology. So, you have this confidence on average compared to South Africans, while you walk like you owe the state so to speak, South Africans are yet to imbibe such. For me, that is the spirit that we need to move forward. To fully engage, we need confidence. You should continue to walk without apology, to know that you belong on the planet earth not by mistake but by design. To own the space that you are walking on, because in East Africa, people walk like they are on borrowed space. But, Nigerians walk like they are ogas, even when they do not have some money in their pockets. I like that.

**The Story of How Privileged I Have Been**

I was born in a very humble family. In Uganda, humble is a political word, which means poor. I lost my mum when I was nine years old. I grew up in a one-room house and there was a blind (curtain) in between that room. So, the VIPs, who were my mother and father slept on the other side, whereas the rest of us slept on the outer side. That's where I spent most of my time. I know what it means to live on one meal a day, just porridge. I have slept in a sack with grass and that is called the mattress amongst the poor. You turn left, the grass pinches you, and you turn right the grass also pinches you.

At the age of seventeen, I lost my dad. He was a trailor. We were living hand to mouth. I was one of those students who would go to school three weeks later because of lack of school fees. My dad had only two years of schooling, but he was very wise. I remember when I was at school, one day he told me this, he said: I *do not have house* to *give you.* I *do not have land to give you. But, I am giving you education.* Ladies and gentlemen, through education, I own land, I do not have house because I do not want them. But, if I want it, I will buy a house.

The reason I am saying this is because I know we have students here. Please do not take this privilege for granted. We have many uneducated people. We are talking about the VISTA - the window. VISTA means your window. This is your window of opportunity. Maximize it. Honour your lecturers/elders and maximize this moment. I can tell you that I lacked confidence. I lacked confidence to a point because I knew that we were poor, we did not have the background. You see, when you are so poor, you see a beautiful girl and you will even fear to say hello. That continued to even when I was in the University, 1never dated any girl. Why? I feel that we were poor.

But later, I was happy to know that if I am to be fully engaged in this life, I have to build my confidence. I bought both CDs and attended seminars to build my personality, to build my future. Years later, here I am, speaking to such a distinguished audience. Here I am, here I am. By God's grace, ladies and gentlemen I am here and the message I have for you is: I *do not care what your background is, what matters* is – where *are you going?* And I am telling you, if you keep your mind focused on where you are going, forget about the darkness, focus where the light is. If you keep going - I know there will be trials, there will be tribulations, but God's delays are not His denials - you can get there.

**So why should we engage the unengaged in Africa? Why should we care to listen about unemployment in Africa?**

The UN population division stated that in Africa there are about 226 million youths; sixty percent (60%) of them are unemployed. Globally, there are seventy-five million unemployed youth. As a Rotary leader, what I am saying in total is this: *if one of us* is *sick, all of us are not well.* We had a movement where we worked at chasing polio out of the world. As a matter of fact, I tell you, Nigeria was the last country on the African continent to register for being polio free. And I am here to suggest to you that the last shall be the first. So, if Nigeria was the last to have polio out, I am suggesting to you that you can be the first to clear unemployment in Africa so that you are declared unemployment-free. I am also saying that if we could chase polio out of the world, then it's time we chased unemployment out of Africa, because it is the number one killer, the number one time bomb.

I can see we have distinguished ladies and gentlemen from the front to the back, then I am saying, unless we enable our youths to move forward, then they will move forward to our homes, our farms and say: *this is ours, get out.* So for me, the more we take care of our youths, the more they will take care of us. And the more we harness this population of the youths, the future of Nigeria (and Africa) is better.

You see some people say: *but the youths you are talking about are killers, liars, and they do not listen to us, why should we listen to them?* My message to you is this: *if you are beyond the age of the youth, at one time you were a youth and someone believed in you and here you are smiling. I* am suggesting too that you and I should trust some of our youths and give them a second chance. Let's give our youths a second chance to harness this great population of the youths.

I am here to suggest that as our forefathers like Nnamdi Azikiwe who mentored Kwamen Nkruma, whose movement was about letting Africa to be independent - self-determination, that unless we empower ourselves economically, then, we are not free. We are not independent. Previously, it was Pan-Africanism, now is the time to celebrate African-entrepreneurship - that's the future.

**So, why do we have unemployment: You may wonder?**

I believe that we have some extra challenges which you know better which I do not want to get into - from corruption to all sorts of things in Nigeria. I also believe that our educational system is quite challenged and it needs to be re-addressed. I was chatting with the amiable Vice Chancellor, who has this quire, charm and intellectual depth about himself and he told me that you want to switch from theories to practicals. And I am saying, how can a University graduate come out of an institution, having a Masters' in business administration, and yet has never run even a little store of tomatoes as business? How? Someone can even have a Ph.D. in business without ever running a business. And I am saying for me, that does not make sense. I am here to suggest that I understand you have a score in entrepreneurship, but of course, there has to be practical demonstration of how you live what you are claiming to own. For me, someone should not have a Bachelor's or Masters' degree (if I have the power, which I do not have unfortunately, but we have the leaders we have the powers) in business administration unless they have demonstrated that they are capable of running a business, which can be run anywhere: They should demonstrate practical skills.

We also have the white collar mentality. In Uganda, what I have noticed in East Africa (I suspect is the same with Nigeria), whereby when people are not in an office, they do not feel respected. People are abusing the native jobs. I do not know how it is in Nigeria, but people who have downtown jobs (so-called dirty jobs) have more money than us that put on ties and suites. You need to change your orientation.

In Africa, we have the rescuing mentality instead of the empowering mentality. This is what I mean - when someone is in trouble, you just get money out of your pocket and offer to the person. One month later what happens? They come back, then you give them more. One year later, what happens? They come back and you give them more. Let me ask you a question: *do you have unlimited resources in* *your pocket?* No absolutely! So for me, 1 have adopted a new strategy. My sister Saphina is at the University, Macado University Business School. I supported her to high school. When she came to the University under government sponsorship, I said Phina, this is what you are going to do, I want you to use your brain and think of a business you can start with about twenty dollars, such that when this business grows, you can take care of yourself. This was because she still was coming to ask for money for this or that. Unlike when she was in the high school, I thought now that she had gotten government sponsorship I would have rest, but she would come requesting for money to photocopy material, for food etc., and it was tiring. And I have a wife and a child -lovely wife by the way, happily married. So, she started okirika business. She would get the okirika, iron them and sell them at a profit. I told her if you double the capital that I have given you, I will give you an extra fifty dollars to motivate her. In less than a month, Phina brought me the money and said; here it is, give me more. I gave her an extra fifty dollars, worth of Ghana Shillings. From then on, it's one and half years at school now, Saphina has never asked me for money to photocopy her papers, buying food at school, or any of those. The only time I had come in is when she had fallen sick. Ladies and gentlemen, that is empowerment. It's sustainable! It's sustainable!

My dear who is here, please start looking at yourself, instead of asking for pocket money, ask for money to start a little business - whatever it is - so that you can grow and become independent, then you can walk tall and say: *I am a proud Igbo man or proud Igbo girl.*

Another thing that has caused unemployment is what they called 'The Net Sayers.' When I said that as a motivational speaker, my guardian asked me: why don't you get a real job? Because in 1998 when I started out, when I had a dream, when I was like you in this auditorium, I had a dream to be a motivational speaker, to speak across the world, I had that dream, at your age – please dream, dream. The older you grow, the less time you have to dream, because there is so much demand on you. You have an opportune moment now, stay away from gossiping and all that, and dream and believe in your dreams. Believe in your dreams, ladies and gentlemen. If I had listened to my guardianon his question: *why don’t you have the real job.* I would not have had the job that I love.

There are people called dream boosters and dream killers. The problem that we have is that we spend more time in the bedroom then the boardroom, saying that God will take care of them. This is how we find our youth (young people) not as empowered. Adults must understand that what makes a man is taking personal responsibility. Take responsibility for your children. In East Africa, we have men who just open their zips at will, but they also deny the same children at will. So, I am suggesting, please do not produce more children, unless you are willing to produce more in tangible terms.

**How do we create jobs and more enterprises?**

**1. Strategies and Techniques**

a. You look for a problem and ask yourself: *how do I solve that problem for pay.* There are many definitions of entrepreneur. But my favourite definition is from M.M Pegger, he describes an entrepreneur as someone who solves a problem at a profit. And I love that. While on the plane to Enugu, I met an interesting young man, he said: *people keep complaining about problem, but that is where the money* is. *I had colleagues, who struggle to do their washing and ironing, so, I said I could do that at a lesser price than the dry cleaners could collect from you. I started doing that at the University and as we speak, that my colleague has many centres around Enugu State, doing dry cleaning services and helping people to solve the problem of convenience when it comes to dressing.* ***No Problem, No Naira-Solution Equals Naira!***

b. Look for a passion - what are you passionate about? What do you love? For me, I love speaking and talking to people. It is my passion. My gift is in communications. But, the challenge we have with some parents is that we have some parents who are boxing people in a certain direction. You must become an engineer, a lawyer etc. You must become like your uncle who is this or that ... And I am suggesting to you that this is why we sometimes encounter stressed doctors and engineers. Let people pass through that which boil in them. For me, my daddy wanted me to become either a doctor or an engineer. But when it came to sciences, I rarely passed them, but I was brilliant in the arts. So I told him Dad, things have not worked out; things are not working out ooh. He said, oya do the arts and I was brilliant at stories and here I am telling you stories. I am making a living for the past twelve years speaking and I love it. Therefore, once you discover your gift or talent, its time you asked yourself this core question: *how can I get people to pay me to do what I love doing.*

So for me, I have to package myself into different ways and means, and people are paying me to do that. For me, I believe that life is meant to be enjoyed. It does not make sense to me to spend eight hours of your life doing something you hate because of the pay cheque. So, why not be paid to have some fun. I hope you love what you are doing.

c. There was a young man who was unengaged and this guy was saying: *there is no money, there is no money in Uganda.* And this old man said, hai there is no money? He said, yes, there is no money. And the old man said: *okay, do you have something you can sell to me,* so *that I will buy* it *and give you money?* The guy turned in anger and said: *no, but there is no money you know.* The old man said: *how do you expect to get money?* The pin dropped and the guy shut up his mouth. How many of us have something to sell?

As for me, I have something to sell. Right here, I have one on ***Succeeding Like Crazy,***a DVD on ***Public Speaking***and one on ***Successful Selling****.* These DVDs go for about ten thousand naira. I have an audio book on ***Wisdom and Success****.* This goes for about eight thousand naira. Why? It is because I know that some of you have a lot of money, and you might buy. That way when I go back home, I can buy a traditional Nigerian dress for my wife. Then she will give me the most passionate hug ever for having returned from Nigeria. So, if you do not buy, it's me to blame. But, at least I won't say that I never had something to sell. And I have twenty-three products of this kind, and look at me, look at my size, if I can produce twenty-three, how much can the strong, energetic tall Nigerians do? How much more when you have wheat, fuu-fuu? These are energy-giving foods. You can do even more than Etham.

d. Once more, I want to focus on the Mindset because strategy is not enough, there has to be a right mindset. There is an African proverb which goes like this: *if there* is *no enemy within, the enemy out there can do you no* *harm.* So, the number one mindset that you have to dispel (especially among the youths) is the excuse that we do not have capital. For capital, the root word is capita, which means head. So, when you say that you do not have capita, all you are saying is that you do not have a head. It is not about your resources ladies and gentlemen, it is about your resourcefulness. And that is what the Vice Chancellor and Senator Obi were alluding to, that you have to tap into your wisdom. For me, when I was twenty-six, I convinced a lady who was about forty-two, and I said: *1can coach you* to *live a better life.* She was a medical doctor. I convinced her, she went to three other women, they paid me money which was about (I think) five hundred dollars then. I even borrowed twenty-five thousand Ghana shillings, which was about ten dollars then to photocopy the materials, got a taxi (special hire), bought a glass of juice and sat waiting for them. And they came, they found me very collected, looking intelligent and I started my journey. I used my brain (my capital).

In today's day and age, if you have access to internet, you have a phone, and you have a functioning brain, never ever use the word I do not have capital. Put your head to task. But you see, sometimes, you do not want to think. But you want to spend time watching television, where people have fun for us. And we forget that you are paying millions and millions of dollars every time you are watching them. You are spending your valuable time and brains to watch them. They are earning but you are spending, even the little money you have. Some of us even borrow to impress people that do not care for us, that do not even love us and then I begin to wonder, what is wrong with us? God! God!! God!!!

I think that the other challenge that we have is the challenge of a hundred percent responsibility. Victor was born in Aniocha. I found him on the plane and he said: *know what?* 1*was at the ghetto at one time, but this guy looked up to me, gave me fifty dollars and I started working. And then, the wife said that there was a big problem, they chased me out of their home and I went back to the ghetto. Someone looked up to me and gave me a little capital and I started.* Right now as we are speaking, Victor has six shops in Aniocha. I met him on the plane, he was coming from China. What was the difference? The difference was: *victor never forgot that he* is a *hundred percent responsible for his life.* And the day I committed myself from just not being this poor beggar asking for people to help me, and I started looking up to myself, life changed. And that's my challenge too. Are you taking hundred percentage responsibility?

I also believe that the other mind set we should have is that life is an audition. Every moment you get life is testing you - are you worthy? Last night I was watching dance with Peter and these Nigerians and Ghanaians just had two minutes to impress the judges - two minutes. Those two minutes can determine their future or their demise. So every moment you have, however little the job is, please carry it with all your strength, because if you are not faithful with the little opportunity, God will not give you a big opportunity. If you have job, do it with all your heart and with all your spirit. And I will also challenge us, I know Nigerians, we are very brilliant, we have so many degrees, so, I am challenging you, you need to move from counting your degrees to counting your enterprises, from counting how many masters and doctoral degrees (that time is valuable and I value education), but I would also love to start seeing you counting how many jobs you have created - celebrating that. But, I also have to suggest to you, please start with what you have, because life does not pay for excuses. Start with what you have created.

I read a story in the Bible, when Moses was going to cross through the red sea and I understand that Igbos have connections with the Israelites, so this is a relevant story. Moses was crying out to God saying: *what do I do now?* God asked a brilliant question - *what do you have?* Moses said: *I have a big staff* God said: *okay, use that staff to strike the waters, and the waters parted.* And boom, the Israelites were free and the Igbos were born. And I say to you that as you cry out to your mothers and fathers, guardians, your governors, politicians, or whoever it is, God is reminding you, *what do you have?* And I am here suggesting to you, if you have education, energy, the brain, you have all it takes to succeed. Let's engage my youths. Let's engage my dear professors. My dear teachers, lets engage.

e. The next one ladies and gentlemen is: 'Life itself is dangling opportunities at us, just putting up your hand is not enough, being interested is not enough, grumbling (some of us are there grumbling) is not enough, you have to step up and take action, you have to step up and take action. So please remember to take action.

And as I conclude, I like to ask my leaders, our political and intellectual leaders to exercise integrity, to remember the spirit of Zik, to have a track record of action. It is not enough to politicize, when you see us unemployed, please try to pull us along. I think right now Nigeria should be selecting leaders based on enterprises and the jobs they have created for this Nation, because it is the number one problem. And I wish our leaders will also start enterprising, where they start declaring I do not need any salary from the state. I will take care of myself.

For the youths, I encourage you to start with whatever you have, with wherever you are. Honour your elders, tap into their wisdoms. But also! remember one leader in Uganda, who is a businessman. I think the media called him Robert Cawshenga. He was with the youth one time at the university like this and said: *the government, anyone, they owe you nothing.* And in my head I was like this man is a jack. But even as I pondered on that I remembered this: *the moment you cross the age of eighteen, you are called an adult. No one owes you anything.* Once you adopt that mentality, let the other opportunities from the state become as a bonus, but, you are in charge of your life. Once you have an education, no one owes you anything. Take charge of your life.

I want to end with this quote from the famous Zik, he said: *There is plenty of room at the top because very few people care to travel beyond the average lots; and so, most of us seem satisfied to remain within the confines of mediocrity.* And I think it is the challenge for us in Africa to pursue not to be beggars but leaders; to pursue not to be consumers but creators. That the world was scrambling for resources in Africa, it's time that the world scrambles to run to us to buy world class car, cameras, coals, so that Africa retains its leadership. The wisdom, the future of humanity was born in Africa, that's what we know. Let's rewrite the future. Let us Africans rise up and say: *we are tired of being second class citizens in our continent.* And every generation comes at a time we will tax. And that tax for our creator is: *why has God created us?* We cannot live on just begging. We have to start creating. We have to look at the problems on planet earth, and become solution providers rather than complainers. To rise up and own up and say: *as a co-creator, I am here on purpose. I am here on special mission.* Even if people doubt you and call you ugly, short, small, it does not matter. Be informed that you are created here and you are here on a special mission. Find your purpose, do your very best, add value to this world and Africa shall rise again and we will not be having any unengaged hands, we will be having fully engaged hands.

God bless Nigeria! God bless Africa!! God bless the world!!!

Thank you very much. Thank you, thank you.