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ON THE CONVOCATION LECTURE

AT

**THE CHRISLAND UNIVERSITY,
ABEOKUTA, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA**

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**“LEADERSHIP, SUSTAINABLE GROWTH, A NATIONAL BUILDING IN AFRICA:
A REFLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE”**

- Your Excellency Chief Dr. Olusegun OBASANJO, GCFR (Former President, Federal Republic of Nigeria,
- H.E. Prince Dapo Abiodun MFR, The Executive Governor of Ogun State,
- Hon. Olakunle Oluomo Taiwo, Speaker of Ogun State House of Assembly,
- High Chief Dr (Mrs) Winifred Awosika, OON Founder and Chancellor Chrisland University
- Distinguished Professor Ayodeji Olukoju, FNAL Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, Chrisland University.
- Prof. Chinedum Peace Babablola, FAS, FAAS, Vice-Chancellor , Chrisland University
- My Lords Spiritual and Temporal, Your Highnesses, Esteemed Guests of the University, Members of Senate, the Academic and Administrative Staff of the University, the Gentlemen of the Press ,the distinguished dynamic graduates today and all students of this great University

It is with unfathomable gratitude to God Almighty and humility that I present this key note address on the theme: “LEADERSHIP,SUSTAINABLE GROWTH, AND NATIONAL BUILDING

IN AFRICA : A REFLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE “ at this time of Global Pandemic and continental synergy with corresponding energy.

Having thanked God, the fountain of all blessings, I must emphasize on this auspicious occasion the need for leadership, sustainable growth and National Building in Africa to which I have a Continental Responsibility as the current Commissioner For Human Resource, Science and Technology for the past three years plus.

I am greatly honoured to have been invited to speak at the Chrisland University Convocation Ceremony today. I am grateful to the University Management for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with graduands and faculty on this auspicious occasion and challenging times. Auspicious because we are celebrating exemplary achievements; a refreshing moment for all of you who are clearing yet another hurdle in life. On the other hand, it is also challenging as we are faced with an unprecedented public health emergency – the CORONAVIRUS Pandemic.

What is leadership and what is the link between leadership, sustainable Growth and Nation building? What is the implication of leadership to Sustainable growth and the Prospects of Nation building in Africa? There is a link a link between effective leadership approaches, like the transformational leadership approach, and the attainment of sustainable Growth / development.

African leaders must have a political will that speaks to sustainable growth in our communities. Effective leadership styles will create sustainable growth/ development for the citizenry in the continent. Many critics have submitted that Africa’s poor economic development is a consequence of

a weak leadership (See Ochola (2007), Everest-Philips (2012)). Ochola (2007) further opines that leadership in Africa is typically ineffective and characterized by susceptibility to the complex global economic system. What then is leadership?

The construct of leadership, as a determining factor to the realization of collective goals fueled by man's insatiable needs dictated by changes in time and also its interaction with a wide range of entities (individuals, assets and community) with different demands and behaviors must always seek to catch up to ensure its relevance, hence, its dynamic nature. (203)

What are the problems we have in leadership?

- Institutional and structural weaknesses (Yeates et al., 1996; Killick et al., 2001),
- limited attention to private enterprise development (Fafchamp et al., 2001),
- poor governance (Kamoche, 1997) and
- limited staff motivation (Okpara, 2006; Okpara and Wynn, 2007).

(Cited in "Effective leadership and Sustainable Development" 203 Journal of Global Responsibility Vol. 5 No. 2, 2014pp. 203-218).

The African union Agenda 2063 underscores the relevance of good governance to sustainable development, leadership affects the sustainable development. The African Union Commission is, and will continue to play its brokerage role towards facilitating the realization of Agenda 2063 and the African Union's vision of "*an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in International arena.*"

It must be mentioned that it is not only the role of the leader that leads to the achievement of sustainable growth and nation building but a holistic approach that speaks to inclusivity and a holistic approach such as the “contributions of followers and the need for enhanced relationship between leaders and followers for effectiveness in goal attainment”(204).

In January 2013, the African Union Summit adopted Agenda 2063 – “The Africa We Want” – as Africa’s blueprint and master plan for sustainable development and economic growth of the continent. The foundation of this master plan are the aspirations which are as follows:

Aspiration 1: A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development

Aspiration 2: An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance

Aspiration 3: An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law

Aspiration 4: A peaceful and secure Africa

Aspiration 5: An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics

Aspiration 6: An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of its women and youth

Aspiration 7: Africa as a strong, united, and influential global player and partner.

For us to achieve the Vision of Agenda 2063, Change the glooming narrative of the African youth, the leaders must invest in good governance to achieve this goal. Good governance is a reflection of an effective leadership and vice versa. Show me leader with a penchant to serve his people, meet the needs and aspirations of his citizens, and achieve collective growth for the populace and I will show you a leader who is result/performance oriented and implements good governance. This reminds us on the famous speech by H.E. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who reminded his peers that Africa is rich and that we can achieve development when we are together and united and that science and Technology is central to achieving that.

‘We shall accumulate machinery and establish steel works, iron foundries and factories; we shall link the various States of our continent with communications; we shall astound the world with our hydroelectric power; we shall drain marshes and swamps, clear infested areas, feed the under-nourished, and rid our people of parasites and disease. It is within the possibility of science and technology to make even the Sahara bloom into a vast field with verdant vegetation for agricultural and industrial developments. We shall harness the radio, television, giant printing presses to lift our people from the dark recesses of illiteracy.

Here we see a leader with a vision. Another leader H. E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo once said “ *Nigeria has no business with poverty. With our Human and material resources, we shall strive to eradicate poverty in our country.*” I dare to add that we will eradicate poverty in our continent. Here is political leadership with the vision of sustainable growth. “ I will devote all my energy and all the powers available to me to the service of Nigeria and humanity”. This has been exemplified all though his life with the many

legacies he has implemented. He further added that “ the major pillars of Africa’s progress are five “P”s: Politics (Sound, People Centred governance;) Population(Managed for optimal benefit and fulfillment) Prosperity(Lifting people out of poverty) Protection(All round security for all): and Prtnership (Within Africa and between Africa and the rest of the world).

By 2063, Africa aims to be amongst the best performers in global quality of life measures. This will be attained through strategies for inclusive growth, job creation, increasing agricultural production; investments in science, technology, research and innovation; gender equality, youth empowerment and the provision of basic services including health, nutrition, education, shelter, water and sanitation.

The issues surrounding African youth and their development remains central to the development agenda of the continent. Aspiration 6 of the AU Agenda 2063, emphasizes the importance of unleashing the potential of youth towards achieving the Africa we want. As we all know, youth are a crucial demographic in Africa, and we have a responsibility to optimize our work to ensure their development.

Key programmes and initiatives have been identified as key to accelerating Africa’s economic growth and development by 2063 as well as promoting our common identity by celebrating our history and our vibrant culture. The Flagship projects encompass amongst others education, science, technology, infrastructure, arts, and culture as well as initiatives to secure peace on the continent. They include:

- The PAN AFRICAN VIRTUAL AND E-UNIVERSITY, established in 2019 aims to use ICT based programmes to increase access to tertiary and continuing education in Africa by reaching large numbers of students and professionals in multiple sites simultaneously.
- The AFRICA OUTER SPACE STRATEGY aims to strengthen Africa's use of outer space to bolster its development. Outer space is of critical importance to the development of Africa in all fields: agriculture, disaster management, remote sensing, climate forecast, banking and finance, as well as defense and security.
- The INTEGRATED HIGH-SPEED TRAIN NETWORK project aims to connect all African capitals and commercial centres through an African High-Speed Train Network thereby facilitating the movement of goods, factor services and people. The increased connectivity by rail also aims to reduce transport costs and relieve congestion of current and future systems.
- The FORMULATION OF AN AFRICAN COMMODITIES STRATEGY is seen as key to enabling African countries to add value, extract higher rents from their commodities, integrate into the Global Value chains, and promote vertical and horizontal diversification anchored in value addition and local content development.
- THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA aims to boost Africa's trading position in the global market place and use trade more effectively as an engine of growth and sustainable development by doubling intra-Africa trade, strengthening Africa's common voice and policy space in global trade negotiations.
- The establishment of THE AFRICAN PASSPORT AND FREE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE will remove restrictions on Africans

ability to travel, work and live within their own continent. The initiative aims at transforming Africa's laws, which remain generally restrictive on movement of people despite political commitments to bring down borders with the view to promoting the issuance of visas by Member States to enhance free movement of all African citizens in all African countries.

- To achieve the goals of Agenda 2063, the African Union is working towards the herculean task of SILENCING THE GUNS and ending all wars, civil conflicts, gender-based violence, violent conflicts and preventing genocide.
- The development of the GRAND INGA DAM PROJECT is expected to generate 43,200 MW of power, to support current regional power pools and their combined service to transform Africa from traditional to modern sources of energy and ensure access of all Africans to clean and affordable electricity.
- The SINGLE AFRICAN AIR-TRANSPORT MARKET aims to ensure intra-regional connectivity between the capital cities of Africa and create a single unified air transport market in Africa, as an impetus to the continent's economic integration and growth agenda. SAATM provides for the full liberalisation of intra-African air transport services in terms of market access, traffic rights for scheduled and freight air services by eligible airlines thereby improving air services connectivity and air carrier efficiencies.
- The ANNUAL AFRICAN ECONOMIC FORUM, is expected to bring together the African political leadership, the private sector, academia and civil society to reflect on how to accelerate Africa's economic transformation harnessing its vast resources to enhance the development of the African people. The forum discusses key opportunities as well as the constraints that hamper economic

development and proposes measures to be taken to realize the Aspirations and goals of Agenda 2063.

- The creation of the AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS will aim at accelerating integration and socio-economic development of the continent through the establishment of organizations which will play a pivotal role in the mobilization of resources and management of the African financial sector. The financial institutions envisaged to promote economic integration are the African Investment Bank and Pan African Stock Exchange, the African Monetary Fund and the African Central Bank.
- The PAN-AFRICAN E-NETWORK aims to put in place policies and strategies that will lead to transformative e-applications and services in Africa; especially the intra-African broad band terrestrial infrastructure; and cyber security, making the information revolution the basis for service delivery in the bio and nanotechnology industries and ultimately transform Africa into an e-Society.
- CYBER SECURITY, also adopted as a flagship programme of Agenda 2063 is a clear indication that Africa needs to not only incorporate in its development plans the rapid changes brought about by emerging technologies, but also to ensure that these technologies are used for the benefit of African individuals, institutions or nation states by ensuring data protection and safety online. The Cyber Security project is guided by the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.
- The African Charter for African Cultural Renaissance recognizes the important role that culture plays in mobilizing and unifying people around common ideals and promoting African culture to build the ideals of Pan-Africanism. The GREAT AFRICAN MUSEUM project aims to create awareness about Africa's vast, dynamic and diverse

cultural arte facts and the influence Africa has had and continues to have on the various cultures of the world in areas such as art, music, language, science, and so on. The Great African Museum will be a focal center for preserving and promoting the African cultural heritage.

- The ENCYCLOPEDIA AFRICANA will provide an authoritative resource on the authentic history of Africa and African life as a body of truth for Africans to guide and unite them in their development with foundations in all aspect of the African life including history, legal, economic, religion, architecture and education as well as the systems and practices of African societies.

Sustainable growth leads to nation building only if the political will has the vision of development. Sustainable development is multifaceted and multidimensional nature. According to ecologists, sustainability literally refers to the preservation of the state and function of the ecological system. Meanwhile, sustainability is considered as the maintenance and improvement of the lives of humans by economists (207). The central tenet of sustainable development reveals three distinct components: environment, society and economy that are intertwined and not separated. Here we see the strategic linkages between Leadership, Sustainable growth and Nation building. Thus, McKeown insists that achieving sustainable development requires a more balanced relationship among the environment, society and economy in pursuit of development and improved quality of life (Mckeown (2002). We conclude by emphasizing that leadership is imperative in promoting sustainable development.

The concept of sustainable development was popularized by the World Commission on Environment and Development in the Brundt land report as development that meets the needs of the present without

compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Martin Luther King Jr. opined that: *“The ultimate measure of a man (woman) is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he (or she) stands at times of challenge and controversy.”* I believe it was times such as what we face today that he was referring to. When the world and Africa in particular is faced with immense challenges.

For societies, regions, economies, and even families that were already facing a myriad of other challenges and life’s hustles, the pandemic couldn’t have come at a worse time. The Education sector has been among the sectors most affected as countries put in place measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. Education is a major catalyst for socio-economic development, and its interruption if unabated may herald grave consequences of monumental proportions.

Effective leadership is therefore essential when we are faced with difficult situations, and the entire team needs support and direction when sailing through headwinds and turbulent times. Apart from the COVID-19, the education sector faces critical questions on quality and relevance. Are we churning out graduates who will be perpetual job seekers or solution seekers armed with 21st century skills for a very dynamic world that we live in today. Real leaders are the ones that calm the turbulent sea with great confidence and steer the ship out of the tempest.

Speaking on this subject, American General Douglas MacArthur observed that *“A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent.”*

It is in dynamic times that a great leader must have clarity of and remain true to their vision while emphasizing adherence to organizational values and principles so that everyone rows in the same direction. In leading through the storms, a great leader guiding the team through, often unexpected events that rock routines and demand new clearer directions.

It behooves on today's leaders to adopt a paradigm shift that allows for exercising of a duty of care for an interdependent society of which they are part, and their own sustainability as they seek to achieve their mission. Also critical to sustainable development is an integration of creativity, clarity of vision and a participatory approach.

As a community of scholars, it is imperative therefore that with the capacities you now have, you be at the forefront in providing solutions for addressing the myriad of challenges we face today including the adverse impacts of COVID-19 in our communities.

We must also embrace and derive joy from adopting the spirit of service to humanity. Albert Einstein – the great scientist observed that: ***“Man (woman) is here for the sake of others, above all for those upon whose smile and well-being our own happiness depends, and also for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy.”***

The ravages of COVID-19 has tightened this bond even much stronger as we protect and care for one another by wearing masks, keeping social distance and wash hands with soap!

As we seek to build back and check further slide into the abys of despair, you have the power to make critical interventions within your communities that will among others; eliminate inequality, reduce poverty, prevent

needless deaths and illness, broaden participation in democratic processes, foster peace and ultimately, develop our economies.

Among the critical issues Africa faces today is the bludgeoning youth population, and with it, the challenge of youth unemployment.

Recent data from the National Bureau of Statistics here in Nigeria reveals that unemployment rate as at the second quarter of 2020 is 27.1%. The data also reveals the worst-hit are Nigerian youths with over 13.9 million currently unemployed and 40% of Nigerians lived in poverty. These are grim figures, and its not quite a surprise that the youth are increasingly becoming restless given the events in the recent past that included current discourse on policing.

The high rate of unemployment, including among university graduates across the continent often casts a dark shadow on the relevance of Higher Education in Africa. Some university graduates are themselves not so hopeful of their future in terms of acceptance into the workplace and the contributions they can make with the now all too common mismatch between graduate competencies and labour market and societal needs.

The world you are entering as a graduate today has tremendously changed, and continues to change, at an incredibly rapid pace. Gone are the days when you would graduate and get straight into a job. The 21st century landscape is very different and requires resilience and adaptive skill sets, which I believe you have acquired and will enable you thrive in an extremely competitive, innovation led and data driven economy.

To be resilient means having the tenacity to get through tough times, feeling confident in yourself and your abilities, bouncing back from adversity, and being in control so that you can move forward and thrive. The impacts of COVID-19 - unemployment, depressed economy among

other social, political and economic strains, grave as they may be, must not dent the grit for resilience.

Successful people and strong nations are resilient. They stay the course, remain focused and persevere in spite of setbacks and temporary setbacks, whatever they may be.

As echoed in the Mission of the **Chrisland University** to teach and inspiring youth to *“advance the realm of knowledge by cultivating their faculty of academic enquiry, creative scholarships, research discovery and the application of new knowledge to the transformation of the individual and society.”*

The onus is on you and your commission today, from these hallowed grounds of Chrisland University, is; **to go therefore and live this dream.** You will be critical assets in the talent pipeline needed to navigate through emerging opportunities in fields with greatest demand today that did not even exist even a few years ago. These include fields such as cloud computing, social media, big data analytics among others.

To effectively compete and contribute meaningfully as an educated citizen in this global world, you need to be prepared to lead not only in your field of expertise but also in fields that don't yet exist. I am confident that the expertise you have gained here at Chrisland University has prepared you well to be agile in the face of an increasingly dynamic, global world. Your ability to make connections, to engage with and learn from diverse perspectives, will be key to your success and your education at Chrisland has prepared you well for this.

Ladies and gentlemen;

COVID-19 has impressed upon us the urgent need to rethink and re-engineer innovative learning methods and strategies that enable teaching

and learning without the need for physical presence. Open, Distance and E-Learning models must now be part of the unassailable architecture of accessible, quality and relevant education and training provision.

As institutions move forward in this new normal, and as institutions plan and implement their reopening strategies, we need to be fundamentally engaged in reviewing the very purpose of education in a digitally enabled, complex and fast changing world. The growth potential of the digital economy also presents enormous opportunity to tackle the challenge of youth unemployment with a robust focus on fostering youth-led digital entrepreneurship.

We must therefore make concerted efforts in recalibrating our Education systems and seize the new opportunities offered in the changing digital space to create a better future for Africa's youth while developing our economies.

Africa is at the cusp of a technological revolution and the Fourth Industrial Revolution that is fundamentally altering our societies today, with automation threatening to replace labour across the entire economy. It is therefore not a surprise that there's a large-scale decline in some roles as jobs become redundant or automated.

As the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution create new pressures on labour markets, opportunities should be created for reskilling and up-skilling in order to be competitive. As the types of skills needed in the labour market change rapidly, we must all embrace lifelong learning to remain not only relevant and employable but also achieve fulfilling and rewarding careers. This will also allow youth to maximize their potentials in emerging world of work with resultant access to new economic opportunities.

Africa's premier development blueprint Agenda 2063 commits to speeding up actions that will *“Catalyse education and skills revolution and actively promote science, technology, research and innovation, to build knowledge, human capital, capabilities and skills to drive innovations for the Africa's future.”*

The envisaged Education and Skills Revolution will only be possible if those charged with making the revolution happen take action. It is critical that our intellectual capital and resources keep pace with the incendiary information explosion occasioned by developments in the global digital ecosystems. Africa should not always be playing catch-up, but through institutions of higher learning, strive to develop sufficient intellectual capacities to be part of this revolution in Africa.

It is therefore enlightening that Chrisland University is already providing a platform for engagement of distinguished thought leaders from the public, private and social sectors seeking solutions to achieve the desired education and skills development outcomes.

It is important that Higher Education institutions invest in Research Collaborations across disciplines and institutions. Pulling of resources together for research that is relevant to the socio-economic and developmental needs of African society should be a top priority. Such studies and meaningful collaborations have the potential of attracting industries in Africa to invest in the research programs while heightening the institutions' impact in the local context and expanding youth employment opportunities.

To have optimal impact on the African continent, and to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that the fundamental roles

of higher education systems in Africa are reevaluated and reconditioned to be agile and adaptive for the ever dynamic 21st century society.

The African Union Commission in partnership with the European Union is already contributing on this front through several initiatives including the African Union Research Grant Programme. This is with the overall objective of improving science and technology research capacity with a knock-on impact on sustainable development and poverty reduction in Africa.

Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,

To facilitate a positive change and enhance human capacity development in Africa, the African Union has developed key strategic frameworks to guide Member States towards fostering Education and Skills Revolution. These include: The Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024); the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25); and the Continental Strategy for Technical, Vocational, Education and Training (TVET) to foster Youth Employment. When implemented these strategies will be instrumental in accelerating the attainment of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

These strategies must be weaved into the intricate tapestry of building quality Higher Education Systems for development of Africa's human capital and positively respond to the continental and global challenges of the twenty-first century. African Higher Education institutions must therefore play their part as citadels of Learning, Research and Development of Africa's human capital for the realization of Agenda 2063.

The African Union Commission is, and will continue to play its brokerage role towards facilitating the realization of Agenda 2063 and the African Union's vision of *"an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven*

by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in International arena.”

In conclusion,

Let me emphasize that it is also important that we do not forget to strengthen Career Guidance and Life Skills opportunities. Social, critical and analytical thinking, human relations, among others life skills are important so that learners are not just like automatons, but youth who understand their environment.

As our societies becomes more multicultural and globalized, knowledge of Pan-Africanism is also a significant element of a well-rounded education. This will ultimately enrich experiences of learners in Africa by heightening their awareness of and sensitivity to cultural diversity and Africa’s common heritage. It is impossible to achieve the Agenda 2063 vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, whose development is driven by its own people, without increased and sustained investments in quality education, science and technology as well as youth development and empowerment. As it is in the African Union Anthem “Let us all work and toil together to give the best we have to Africa”. Together we are stronger.

Thank you.