



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE CHANCELLOR OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA LEONE, HIS  
EXCELLENCY DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO,  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA  
LEONE, AT THE 2020 UNIVERSITY OF  
SIERRA LEONE CONGREGATION FOR THE  
AWARD OF DEGREES, DIPLOMAS, AND  
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STADIUM. SATURDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2020**

Honourable Vice President, Ministers of Government, Pro Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, faculty and staff of the University of Sierra Leone, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning.

I am truly delighted to be with this new crop of graduates from the University of Sierra Leone.

All glory to God, let me, from the outset, also thank those who have made it possible.

For their great optimism and hope; for investing in your futures without fears; for supporting and cheering you on, let us congratulate all those who are near and dear – parents, guardians, extended family members, spouses, children, and siblings. Graduates, let us give our family members a big round of applause.

For believing in your capabilities; for nurturing your talents and individual abilities; for their patience and service, let us all congratulate faculty and staff who dedicated hours to teaching, research, and ultimately imparting valuable knowledge to you the students. Faculty and staff, yours is yeoman's work for which you can never be truly adequately compensated. Congratulations faculty and staff. They deserve a round of applause.

Graduation speakers normally speak of students traversing "long and arduous journeys" and enduring "hardship, pain, and suffering." If you were looking for pity, I would have said the same words. But you have already withstood the rigours of tertiary education and you are a strong breed.

I am gratified beyond all measure this morning because you are graduating at a time of great expectations from family, your community, and your nation.

That for me inspires hope. That tells me that the future of this nation will be passed on into capable hands who can endure the rigours of hard work; committed and patriotic Sierra Leoneans who are not fazed by four years of journeying up and down Mount Aureol and other campuses or other unspeakable inconveniences one faces as a student.

We will bequeath this nation into the hands of people who have patiently learned new ideas; who are confident about the potential of knowledge to transform themselves and their nation; and ultimately, people who can take great pride in their success. So let us celebrate your success today with a huge round of applause, for you the graduates.

But Vice Chancellor, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I am also personally gratified that there is strong reflection of our national policy practices and aspirations in the University's key imperatives: intentional planning with an eye on achievable outcomes; greater accountability and probity in financial management and the prudent use of resources; leveraging the power of partnerships and collaboration to augment or build national capacity; a university education that supports the key national priorities of quality education, quality healthcare, and food security; a commitment to achieving 100% ICT literacy and the increasing use of digitalisation to guarantee the speed and integrity of processes; and, the training of a new cadre of smart entrepreneurs who will see new opportunities in the diversification of the economy and sub-regional, regional, and international trade pacts.

Vice Chancellor, you have outlined various initiatives from e-portals and biometric registers or refurbishing buildings to MOUs signed with over a dozen institutions and my own Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation. I applaud and encourage the university to keep on, do more, and make the university even better in spite of the existing resource and other constraints.

Vice Chancellor, Faculty and Staff, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, my Government and the University have a singular agenda and a singular objective – to make tertiary education fit for purpose in the twenty first century and to make Sierra Leone an inclusive and sustainable knowledge-based economy.

Even with current budgetary constraints, we have invested 21% of national budget in quality education. We have prioritised human capital development and we have mapped out achievable benchmarks with each of those priorities in providing quality healthcare and achieving food security. With my establishment of the Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation in the Office of President, we can now test, scale, and adapt innovative solutions that support effective and accountable governance, the private sector and business, and university research and operations (as the Vice Chancellor has already outlined in his statement). But more significantly, we are working toward fostering a conducive business environment. The three elements, I have just outlined, to my mind, are essential for creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem.

So the theme of the 2019 /2020 Congregation, “Education toward Entrepreneurship,” especially resonates with my vision for the future of this country. The easy and most unproductive option would be to declare young persons as lazy and harangue them about a mentality change. That approach will not expand national GDP and create jobs. It creates an undignified beggar mentality: “Pappay you borbor dae ya.”

Of course, we now hear the refrain, “Pappay, the gron dry,” from the teeming population of young persons in mainly urban areas of Sierra Leone. Graduates are not excluded. “All man dae ala say the gron dry.” But what are you doing “for make the gron soak for you” and for your community and nation?

Global entrepreneur and my friend, Bill Gates, would say that "your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning." The phrase "the gron dry" by young people has given me pause for thought especially on the great potential and limitless possibilities for young Sierra Leoneans in Sierra Leone.

Thinking deeply about this, to me, is not about winning the next elections. To me, it is about how we permanently transform our nation for our own good.

You see, our economy as it was constituted over the last decade and more is characterised by low to no diversification, low productivity, mainly survivalist "han-to-mot" petty trading or microcredit schemes, and a teeming surplus of labour in urban areas. There is also rural poverty.

And all of this as we sit on over 1.5 million hectares of fertile, arable land traversed by more than half a dozen rivers and with over 7 months of rain, a generous coastline and natural deep harbours to boot.

I see opportunity in this situation. So as you graduate this morning, I want to challenge all of you to be bold entrepreneurs. Relieve yourself of the old and stale logic of "the other party say the gron dry, so leh we vote for dem neks tem."

Adopt a new logic that says "I or we can develop a solution for adding value to agricultural products and market those locally and internationally" or "We can develop solutions or products to cater for tourism, transportation, or other services."

We can roast locally grown Arabica coffee to various tastes and package and label those as organic products from the rainforests of Sierra Leone (and they are). When marketed accordingly, it will create a brand Sierra Leone, contribute to GDP, create jobs, and create wealth for the entrepreneurs in Sierra Leone.

Whatever efficient technologies you use (whether adaptive or disruptive), your objective is clear – create and pursue goals that others are not seeing or can see but have not taken advantage of.

Obviously, for entrepreneurship to thrive, I have stated before that we must create a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem and thus increase participation in entrepreneurship.

The Vice Chancellor, in his address, referenced the young entrepreneurship programme that will benefit from the NUFFIC Orange Knowledge Grant to the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture and the Maastricht School of Management in the Netherlands. I implore university administrators and faculty to develop home-grown entrepreneurship training programmes too that will foster a culture of entrepreneurship among our tertiary education students. In that way, our students and graduates will see that there is a lot more wealth in establishing and running a viable business than in looking for or complaining about the lack of public sector jobs.

Government recognises the value of entrepreneurship to national development. That recognition is embedded in the medium term national development plan.

Already, we are hard at work on ensuring macro-economic stability and eliminating corruption, fraud, and mismanagement. We have undertaken ecosystem strengthening by improving the ease of registering and doing business, introducing favourable incentive and tax policies, and anticipating other factors that inhibit entrepreneurship especially by young persons. We have yet to fully address intellectual property issues or facilitating more linkages with private sector to promote entrepreneurship. We believe we can do more and we will do more.

We have set our sights broadly on creating an inclusive, diversified, and thus resilient economy with broad policy imperatives that favour scaled up investments in agriculture and agro-value chain development, tourism, fisheries, renewable energy within a green economy among a huge compendium of other opportunities.

We believe that we can make it easier for young entrepreneurs to break through by opening up access to credit and expanding credit guarantee schemes, supporting infrastructure and capital development schemes, and guaranteeing innovative but low-interest financing products and loans that will support growth sectors.

With the CLSG line and ongoing off-grid renewable energy projects, we hope to expand energy access to rural areas. We are building bridges and improving roads. Improving rural infrastructure, we believe, will have a multiplier effect for rural entrepreneurship and added to access to credit and various financing products, we can create more jobs, expand productivity, and raise rural incomes.

We will continue playing our part as government but we will consult with and work closely with our development partners and the private sector to achieve these goals.

So as you graduate today, stay focused on how to make your "gron soak." Do so not by the flagrant theft of public funds as other bad actors of yore had made fashionable. That will only destroy this nation. Contribute to this nation's development by engaging in entrepreneurship, developing new products and services, creating jobs, and creating wealth. Take calculated risks but be bold and bullish in your conviction that you will succeed.

I'll leave you with inspiring stories from all over the world and Africa in particular. There is the story of a kid who grew up poor in Communist China, failed college entrance courses and was rejected for several menial jobs. He now owns Alibaba internet trading and he is now worth 25 billion US Dollars. His name is Jack Ma.

Another was born into poverty in southern Russia. While at college, he started a small company producing plastic toys. He was later to acquire an oil company and Chelsea Football Club and he is worth billions. His name is Roman Abrahamovich.

Another dropped out of college, joined the army and while working at a clothing store wondered whether men would wear wider and brighter fashion accessories. His name is Ralph Lauren.

Another one from a poor home drove a taxi to support his university education. He now owns the second largest telecoms company in Nigeria and has stakes in a bank and oil company. He is Mike Adenuga. And there is Chris Kirubi who repaired and sold gas cylinders after graduating from college. He now owns some of the largest malls and several business interests in Kenya and he is worth over a billion US dollars.

On the margins of the mining Indaba in South Africa, I met the sister of this next person who grew up with his sister in a slum to very poor parents. He later worked hard and graduated with a law degree from the University of Witwatersrand. He later founded a mining company and is now worth billions. His name is Patrick Motsepe. By the way, his sister, Bridget Radebe Motsepe is worth hundreds of millions of dollars and she is an outspoken critic of predatory mining companies.



Or another woman I met in South Africa, Daphne Mashile-Nkosi, who grew up poor, got an education, became an activist but now owns a manganese mine and several other business concerns.

After graduating from university, this other multimillionaire, Wendy Ackerman, was a school teacher in some of the poorest areas of South Africa but through entrepreneurship became the director of the financial company Pick N Pay Holdings Ltd.

Or Tiwa Savage, who after graduating from University, pursued her love and talent for music and is now an artist and producer worth millions of dollars.

Let me leave you today with this inspiring story and words of billionaire, Sir Richard Branson, who at age 17 started a mail order business. Later, he became a record tycoon, owns airlines, hotels etc.

He said, "Being an entrepreneur means to have an insatiable thirst for learning, evolving, and creating. [ . . . ]" It is about "turning what excites you in life into capital so that you can do more of it and move forward with it."

So as you leave here today, be bold, be inspired, and turn your insatiable thirst for success into wealth.

I thank you.