

Business Unusual:

Reorienting Local Government in Lira District to Doing Local Economic Development (LED)

Keynote Address delivered by Michael Tebere, Key Expert with the ICON Institute, Germany to Private Sector Actors, Civil Society Organizations, Development Partners and Government Officials at the First Chairman's Dinner called by Lira District Local Government and held in Pauline Annex Hotel, Lira Municipality on Friday 14th June 2019



Friends, Colleagues, Countrymen and Women:

First and foremost, I want to thank you for honoring your invitation to attend this Chairman's Dinner.

I thank you because by so doing you are making history, not only in Lira District Local Government, but in Uganda as a whole: for this is the first Chairman's Dinner in the history of Uganda.

The timing of this dinner is strategic, held as it is in the last quarter of the Financial Year. It sends out a powerful signal from the Executive Branch to the Legislative Branch: we intend to initiate and formulate policies conducive to Local Economic Development in the coming Financial Year.

The signal is intended for Council as the highest political authority in Lira District Local Government: to act and position Local Economic Development high on the legislative agenda.

The signal is intended for the District Executive Committee as the head of the executive authority in Lira District Local Government: to initiate and formulate policy for doing Local Economic Development in Lira.

The signal is intended for citizens and residents as the MIPs (most important persons) in Lira District Local Government: to engage and involve their local government in creating an enabling environment for Local Economic Development.

The signal is intended for Private Business Actors as the biggest risk takers in Lira District Local Government: to identify for Lira District Local Government the bottlenecks and market failures that hamper Local Economic Development.

The signal is intended for CSOs as the expression of local communities in Lira District Local Government: to engage more closely with the local government in new spheres of social enterprise to enhance Local Economic Development.

The signal is intended for Development Partners implementing the goals of development cooperation: to say Lira District is now a pro-active local government open to more strategic partnerships that enable Local Economic Development.

Friends, Colleagues, Countrymen and Women:

I have titled this keynote address “Business Unusual” because the mindset and attitude required to do Local Economic Development requires unusual thinking. It requires stepping away from “business as usual” to doing “business unusual.”

How can we best characterize this “business unusual”? I will borrow a leaf from history, particularly the Bible, and make use of a modern-day parable.

A short story recently went viral on social media. It was titled “IGNORANCE CAN MAKE YOU WORK HARD WITHOUT PROGRESS”. Considering I was working hard at the time, I questioned whether I was progressing, and so decided to read it.

I will take this opportunity to share with you this short, but inspiring story.

An army barracks had four soldiers guarding a concrete slab in front of the Quarter Guard at all times. Different commanders came and went but the practice remained; soldiers kept changing shifts guarding the slab.

Twenty years went by, and a new Commander was assigned to the barracks. Being an inquisitive person, he was quick to ask why things were being done the way they were. So he asked why four soldiers were guarding the concrete slab in front of the Quarter Guard.

He was told the various past commanders of the barracks had always instructed that the slab be guarded.

Being a persistent man, the Commander was determined to find out the reason for this strange practice, which had now become a tradition. He therefore dug into the archives and records of the barracks to look for an answer. And it is there that he came across an old document that had the explanation.

One of his predecessors, now long retired, had wanted to build a platform in the barracks from which officers can review soldiers on parade. But on the night of the day when the concrete slab for the platform was laid, a stray dog ran over it, defacing the smoothed surface before it could dry.

Next day, the soldiers fixed the slab, but the following morning it had been messed up again. It was then that the Commander ordered that henceforth, four soldiers should guard the slab day and night, to ensure it dries without being defaced.

Before the slab had dried adequately to allow construction of the platform to commence, orders from the Army High Command arrived instructing the Barracks Commander to take up command of a new post.

Orders being orders, the obedient Commander immediately left the barracks to take up his new command. And a new Commander was brought in to take over at the barracks.

Being a man who knew not to fix what isn't broken, the new Commander ordered that the barracks carry on as usual.

And so twenty years down the road, four soldiers are obediently standing guard around an old concrete slab in front of the Quarter Guard. It is still their tradition...

This is how Local Government in Uganda has been run since 1992, when it was first piloted in 14 Districts, and since 1997, when it was rolled out to all the then Districts in the country: without the benefit of the sixth of the Seven Pillars of Decentralization – Local Economic Development. It has become our tradition.

Friends, Colleagues, Countrymen and Women:

Today, Lira District Local Government is making history. Thirty-two years since decentralization was rolled out across the country, Lira District Local Government is breaking the tradition of “business as usual” and taking on a collective responsibility: to unlock the socio-economic potential that is embedded in the sixth of the seven pillars of decentralization policy in Uganda – Local Economic Development.

This is “business unusual”. And this is my theme for this keynote address.

Why a collective responsibility?

In 2014, the Government of Uganda, in collaboration with stakeholders, formulated a National LED Policy to provide a framework for partnerships in local economic development and to serve as a vehicle for promoting and implementing LED initiatives at local government level in Uganda.

It is intended to further deepen the decentralization process, eradicate poverty and ensure inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic growth at locality level.

To affirm its commitment, Government adopted LED as the sixth pillar of the Decentralization Policy and Strategic Framework (DPSF) and the Local Government Strategic Investment Plan (LGSSP).

The Vision of the Policy is to build *“A vibrant and competitive private sector-led local economy for poverty reduction, wealth creation and prosperity in Uganda”*.

With the theme of *“Stimulating Partnerships for Sustainable Equitable Local Development”*, the vision contributes to the national Vision of a *“Transformed Ugandan Society from a Peasant to A Modern and Prosperous Country within 30 Years”*.

The Uganda National LED Policy sets the foundation for implementing the National LED Strategy and serves as a framework for resource mobilization and capacity development for the Local Governments and municipal authorities. It is also intended to build community capacity to demand for services and accountability.

The Mission of this policy is: *“To create local and national governance mechanisms which promotes a conducive, economic and political environment for private sector investment, employment creation in local areas for improved household incomes and service delivery.”*

The Overall Goal of this policy is: *“A transformed local government system linked to stakeholders at local and national levels that facilitates effective business-oriented*

locality development with a focus on poverty reduction and sustainable wealth creation.”

Friends, Colleagues, Countrymen and Women:

Policy is a government’s response to an issue. What issue would compel government to develop such a policy then?

To understand the governmentality underpinning the National LED Policy, I had to think unusually. And this unusual pattern of thought led me to rethinking the purpose of Council itself.

In decentralization policy, a Local Government Council is the highest political authority in its area of jurisdiction. These are not light words.

As the highest political authority, a Local Government Council must have a purpose. And our Local Government Councils have six purposes:

1. To promote the ***Welfare of Society;***
2. To promote the ***Just Governance of Humanity;***
3. To be the ***Trustee of the People;***
4. To provide service with ***Faithfulness to the People;***
5. To advance the ***Interests of the People in the LG; and***
6. To promote the ***Honour of God.***

At the heart of all these six purposes lies local betterment, which is delivered through local economic development.

Uganda is a God-loving country. And that is why even our national motto proudly states: “For God and My Country”.

To underscore the Purposes of Council in our elected representatives, the Council Prayer is carefully thought out to incorporate these aspects of local betterment:

Almighty God who in Your infinite wisdom and providential goodness has appointed the offices of Leaders and Councils for the ***Welfare of Society*** and the ***Just Governance of Humanity;*** we beseech you to look upon, with your abundant



*favor, these your Servants, whom you have been pleased to call to the performance of such **Important Trusts** in this land.*

Let Your Blessings** descend upon them here assembled, and grant that they may, as in your presence, treat and consider all matters that shall come under their deliberation, in so **Just and Faithful Manner** as to **Promote Your Honor and Glory**, and to **Advance the Good** of those whose interests you have committed to their charge. **Amen.

Friends, Colleagues, Countrymen and Women:

Having laid out what Lira District Local Government's responsibility for local economic development is, it is now incumbent upon me to share with you some of the opportunities that this "business unusual" approach to local economic development promises to deliver to us.

First and foremost, the Honorable Richard Rashid Opio, Speaker of Lira District Council, the highest political authority in Lira, will, in the first week of July this year, call a meeting of the Business Committee, which comprises the Chairpersons of the Standing Committees of Council, the Chief Administrative Officer and the District Vice Chairperson and Leader of Government Business.

The Honorable Speaker will then guide the Business Committee to ensure that Local Economic Development will now take pride of place on the legislative agenda of Lira District Local Government in this, the Fourth Legislative Session of the 2016-2021 Term of Government.

With LED high on the Legislative Agenda, the Honorable Alex Oremo Alot, District Chairperson Lira District Local Government, will in turn guide Lira District Executive Committee and its Technical Planning Committee to initiate and formulate Local Economic Development initiatives that he will proudly announce to the citizens and residents, private sector actors and civil society organizations, development partners and foreign missions, in his State of the District Affairs Address in line with Sections 13 and 17 of the Local Governments Act.



Second and crucially, the “business unusual” approach will make Lira District Local Government put into effect Section 6 of the Local Governments Act which states:

“Every local government shall be a body corporate with perpetual succession and a common seal, and may sue or be sued in its corporate name and may, subject to the provisions of the Constitution, do enjoy or suffer anything that may be done, enjoyed or suffered by a body corporate.”

Thinking like any well-run business, Lira District Local Government will take a good long look at itself in the mirror, and with a “business unusual” attitude, see that it has a huge inventory of redundant and non-profitable assets that the new partnership we are forging here tonight can and will render performing and profitable!

Thirdly, the “business unusual” approach will position Lira District Local Government to take full advantage of the new Presidential Initiative to Promote Agro-Industrialization for Local Economic Development launched in November 2018 to invest, in partnership with the other Districts of the Lango Sub-Region, in an Agro-Industrial Hub in which private sector actors can establish more of the factories and industries that have justly made Lira the Oil-Seed Capital of Uganda.

It is this new ethos of local governmentality that this Chairman’s Dinner is bringing into Lira. It is this new ethos of local governmentality that our private sector business, our civil society organizations, our development partners will take full advantage of to do Local Economic Development.

Friends, Colleagues, Countrymen and Women:

I will close this keynote address in the manner in which I opened it: with a parable.

During the early years of the 14th Century the foundations of a magnificent cathedral were being laid in central Europe. The Clerk to Works was a monk charged with the task of supervising the work of all laborers and artisans on the site.

One day the monk decided to assess the working practices of the stonemasons. He singled out three masons that he thought would be representative of the whole and decided to interview them. He approached the first stonemason and asked:

“My brother, tell me about your work.”

The first stonemason paused for a while and replied in a clipped voice full of anger and resentment: “As you can very well see, I sit here in front of my block of stone. It measures a meter by half a meter, by half a meter. And with every blow of my chisel against the block I feel as if I am chipping away a part of my life! Look at how callused and hard my hands are! Look at how lined and grey my face and hair is! This work is never ending, day in and day out, it wears me away! Where is my satisfaction? I’ll be long dead before this cathedral is even a quarter finished!”

Nodding silently, the monk approached the second stonemason.

“Brother,” he said, “tell me about your work.”

The second stonemason replied in a soft, even voice: “As you can see, I sit here in front of my block of stone. It measures a meter by half a meter, by half a meter. And with every stroke of my chisel against the block, I sense I am carving out a life and a future. With the pay I earn, I am able to shelter and feed my family. My children are able to go to school. No doubt they will be able to look forward to even more in life than I do now. All this is made possible by my hard work here. As I give to the cathedral through my skill, the cathedral gives back to me!”

Nodding silently, the monk approached the third stonemason.

“Brother,” he said, “tell me about your work.”

The third stonemason smiled broadly and with a voice full of joy said, “As you can see, I sit here in front of my block of stone. It measures a meter by half a meter, by half a meter. And with every caress of my chisel against the block, I know I am shaping my destiny. See how the beauty trapped within the form of this stone begins to emerge? Sitting here, I am celebrating not only my craft and the skills of my profession, but I am also contributing to everything that I value and believe in, a

universe represented by this cathedral where each gives of his best for the benefit of all! Here at my block I am at peace with who I am, and I am grateful that, although I will never see the completion of this great cathedral, it will stand for a thousand years, a beacon celebrating what is truly worthy in all of us, and a testament to the purpose for which the Almighty has put me on this earth!"

The monk went away and reflected on what he had heard. That night, he slept more peacefully than he had ever done before. The next day he resigned his commission as Clerk of Works and apprenticed himself to the third stonemason.

Today, how will we each sleep at night? What old commissions shall we resign? What new apprenticeships shall we take up?

I believe and trust that by hosting this First Chairman's Dinner tonight, Lira District Local Government has broken from the past and started a new tradition in the spirit of the third stonemason.

I believe and trust that by hosting private sector business people, civil society actors and development partners to this First Chairman's Dinner tonight, Lira District Local Government has opened up for business in line with Section 6 of the Local Governments Act:

"Every local government shall be a body corporate with perpetual succession and a common seal, and may sue or be sued in its corporate name and may, subject to the provisions of the Constitution, do enjoy or suffer anything that may be done, enjoyed or suffered by a body corporate."

I say this "For God and My Country."