



OBWAKABAKA BWA BUGANDA

**THE SARAH NYENDWOHA NTIRO
ANNUAL MEMORIAL LECTURE**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**HER ROYAL HIGHNESS SYLVIA NAGGINDA
THE NNAABAGEREKA OF BUGANDA**

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

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The Chairperson and Members of the University Council
Members of the family of the Late Sarah Nyendwoha Ntiro
The Vice Chancellor Professor Barnabas Nawangwe
Members of the University Management and Staff
Distinguished panellists
Under-graduate and graduate students
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my distinct pleasure to join you all this afternoon as we remember and celebrate the life and legacy of the late Sarah Nyendwoha Ntiro.

I thank the University leadership for making the Sarah Ntiro lecture an annual event, which I believe is an affirmation that the inspiration we need, for both our current and future generations, need not be foreign.

I thank the organisers of this memorial lecture for inviting me to deliver the keynote for this year's annual memorial lecture under the theme: **"Catalyzing Change: Women as Pillars of Society"**. I am indeed grateful to the University Council, the Vice Chancellor, the University Management, and the School of Women and Gender Studies

UNDERSTANDING OF PILLARS

I will begin my address by sharing my understanding of the word pillars, and women as pillars in society their importance.

There are many definitions of pillars as one can imagine. The one that caught my interest is that pillars are necessary for the survival of society because they represent strength, stability and support. Mr. Vice Chancellor, as an architect, I am confident that you appreciate the value of pillars for structural support.

At an individual level, I believe that a person who is a pillar in society is respected, selfless, reliable, decent, hard working and is more of a giver than a taker. Pillars of society live purposefully, are present, have self acceptance and esteem, and are responsible, assertive, authentic, trustworthy and respectful of others.

WOMEN AS PILLARS IN SOCIETY

During the Cultural Revolution in China, Mao Zedong said, and I quote, "Women hold up half the sky". I find it most appropriate to contemplate the lives of women like Sarah Ntiro, Joyce Mpanga and Rhoda Kalema, who were instrumental in catalyzing transformational shifts in the lives of girls and women in Uganda.

The former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Anan said, and I quote, "Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than education of girls and the empowerment of women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, lower infant mortality or improve nutrition and promote health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. When women are fully involved, the benefits can be seen immediately. Families are healthier, they are better fed and their incomes, savings and reinvestments go up. And what is true of families is true of communities, and eventually, whole communities" - end of quote.

Centering women in our social development discourse is very important and one way of doing this is by amplifying their seminal contributions towards achieving impact in different fields.

I want to elaborate on how women are indeed catalysts of change through their tireless efforts, advocating for the needs of girl's and women's human development, particularly in education.

Going back in our history some women (and men) have championed the right to education for girls and women. **The inaugural Sarah Ntiro memorial lecture dwelt on her outstanding achievements and contributions to society, and so I will not repeat them today but rather** bring out her peers Joyce Mpanga and Rhoda Kalema who I mentioned earlier, as having been equally instrumental in catalyzing change in the social status of girls and women.

In her autobiography titled, "It's a Pity She's not a Boy", Joyce Mpanga describes how as a member of the Uganda Council of Women she had the opportunity in 1964 to travel to Washington DC, to attend an international conference where she met the former first lady of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt, who handed to her the monetary award she had received at the conference for her outstanding work. She narrates how on her return to Uganda she passed the money on to Uganda Council of Women for education grants for women.

Later in her political career, she used the offices she was appointed to, to advance the causes of girls and women. In her book she describes how as President of the National Council of Women she lobbied President Yoweri Museveni for a policy on women that later in 2007 saw the establishment of a Ministry of Women Affairs in the President's office and her as its Minister. During this period Sarah Ntiro was the Head of the NGO Department in the Prime Minister's Office.

One of the many ground-breaking and change-making actions Joyce Mpanga was able to accomplish was to have the little funding that her Ministry was allotted in the 1988/89 national budget, channelled to education of women initiatives, and she also influenced input on women in the Odoki Constitutional Commission.

Those are some, among the many contributions that Joyce Mpanga made to education.

Rhoda Kalema in her autobiography, "My Life is but a Weaving" identifies Mary Stuart as having established the Uganda Association of University Women to address the low enrolment of women in university, including older women at Makerere College. This saw the enrolment of five female teachers in Makerere College in 1945.

It is important to also acknowledge that later Eunice Lubega Posnansky was the first indigenous Ugandan president of the Uganda Association of University Women and the Director of Women's Education.

Rhoda Kalema, as the National Resistance Council Representative for Kiboga District worked hard to improve girls' access to education and to reduce girls dropping-out from primary schooling. Working with the Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda Chapter, to which she was a member, Rhoda Kalema worked to provide scholastic materials and secure scholarships for disadvantaged girls in her district of Kiboga.

The founders of Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda Chapter, which was launched in 1997, are identified in Rhoda Kalema's autobiography as Joyce Mpanga, Florence Sembatya, Ann Galiwango, Ruth Kavuma and Florence Kanyike. These women truly were catalysers of change in the education of girls and women in Uganda. This women-led NGO today continues to work with stakeholders to improve the quality education for girls and their access to all levels of education. It also not only works to see that girls do not drop-out of schools, but ... that they also complete the cycles of education.

Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda Chapter has accelerated female participation in education and has narrowed the gender gap and in some cases closed the gender gap at some levels of education.

For women to have made defining inroads in girls education in Uganda, and achieved landmark successes was only made possible by some women who came before, who dared to demand for the realization of women's human rights in all aspects of life. All of us today who are working on this issue are riding on the shoulders of these women and owe the progress made and improved status to them.

According to Rhoda Kalema it began with prominent women who were members of the multi-racial and multi-ethnic Uganda Council of Women, namely Eseza Makumbi, Barbara Saben, Catherine Hastie, Sugra Visram, Maherah Ahmed and Hemantini Bhatia, who influenced policy issues and decisions that, impacted the lives of women.

It was the Uganda Council of Women that turned the tide that ushered women's participation in political decision-making – getting a seat around the decision and policymaking table. Among the many things the Council did was the promotion of training of nursery school teachers based on the knowledge that early childhood education is the foundation for learning for all children.

Women are the back bone of families and communities - they provide care, support and nurture mental wellbeing. Women's organisations, initiatives and leaders have played a critical role in empowering women and enabling them to be active citizens, live dignified lives and thrive as human beings. An empowered woman is a better person, mother, worker and citizen capable for taking advantage of opportunities to contribute, lead, make change, have her voice heard and skills employed.

Being the Nnabagereka has provided me with an opportunity to realise my dream of making critical contributions to the development of my own country; something I had constantly yearned to do during the eighteen years I spent studying and working in the United States of America.

The Nnabagereka Development Foundation, which I went on to establish in 2000, responds to the needs of children, women and youth. For over 22 years the foundation has been actively involved in numerous health, education and community development initiatives. Our mission is to leverage culture to improve the economic and social wellbeing of children, youth and women.

Ekisaakaate kya Nnabagereka, which I also established in 2007, builds on this early realization of the importance of children's holistic development by the phenomenal women I mentioned, and on whose shoulders we still ride. *Ekisaakaate kya Nnabagereka* continues to promote the nurturing of children in environments where learning and skilling happens and other needs are met, and over the years has become a time-tested attitude and behaviour adjusting intervention that is held during school holidays and that has impacted the lives of over 35,000 girls and boys directly and millions through broadcast media and online.

The interventions in *Ekisaakaate kya Nnabagereka* are informed by **thinking rooted** in culture, that among other things ignite a sense of pride and dignity in our rich cultural heritage. The interventions aim at enabling the girls and boys to embrace aspects of culture alongside aspects of modernity. This intergenerational transfer of positive attitude, knowledge, values and life skills is in recognition that children as the leaders of tomorrow need good educational, cultural, skilling and emotional grounding. *Ekisaakaate Kya Nnabagereka* was introduced and embraced in Canada, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

In 2017 *Obuntubulamu* which amplifies *Ubuntu*, which is the African philosophy that espouses inter-connectedness, humanity, dignity and communal living, was integrated in *Ekisaakaate Kya Nnabagereka*. Several societal values that make up *Obuntubulamu* were identified through research, and these are: self-reliance, responsibility, respect, self-control, humility, civility, integrity, honesty, sense of shame, responsibility among others. These values are found within communities throughout Uganda and are universal.

The Nnabagereka Development Foundation combines the traditional value system of *Obuntubulamu* with contemporary value systems, to promote moral, just and dignified societies. The shared ethic of *Obuntubulamu* builds character and serves as a connecting thread between people from different nationalities and ethnicities.

CULTURE AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

In promoting the values systems based on *Obuntubulamu*, we are careful to separate positive cultural traditions from the negative ones. Negative cultural values and harmful practices undermine the integrity of the society especially that of women and girls. *Ekisakatte Kya Nnabagereka* promotes the positive cultural values in order to build gender equality, strong families that grow and work together to nurture and shape the character of children, encourage communal support, build unity and a sense of belonging and that values other human beings. The adage, "*The strength of the chain lies in its weakest link*" put differently, is when the most vulnerable of us are free and thriving that we guarantee our collective survival and happiness.

With the support of UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme, the Foundation - NDF partnered with the kingdoms of Acholi, Alur, Bunyoro and Busoga to come up with an indigenous approach to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals – the SDGs. We have also worked with African Queens and cultural women leaders from the kingdoms in Ghana, South Africa, Lesotho and Nigeria, mindful that we have the power to use our privileged positions to improve the lived realities of our people. As the saying goes, “To whom so much is given, much more is expected.”

In 2022, I established the Nnabagereka Nagginda Women’s Fund to raise financial resources for the consistent investment in building peaceful, joyful, progressive and self-sustaining communities. This fund is created and championed by women to reshape the philanthropic landscape and unlock opportunities for social investments that achieve scale, geographical reach and establish a legacy of enduring sustainability.

IN SERVICE OF THE BUGANDA KINGDOM

My address also echoes the voices in my autobiography which intends to inspire readers to embrace their own passions and strive for positive change in their communities. In short, it gives an insight into my life, tracing my journey from early years to becoming the Nnaabagereka, exploring my formative experiences, education, and the profound impact of my family's heritage on shaping my character and values. My story sheds light on the challenges I face as a public figure, and it explores my role as a wife, mother, and diplomat, highlighting the delicate balancing act I have to perform between my royal duties and personal life. As the narrative unfolds, the book delves into my pursuit of empowering women, promoting education, and championing social causes which became the driving force behind my initiatives, ranging from advocating for girls' education, to supporting maternal health and women's economic empowerment and establishing the *Ekisaakaate kya Nnaabagereka* .

In light of that synopsis, I will highlight some lessons learnt - which also speak to strengthening both men and women as pillars of society.

LESSONS TO LEARN

A pillar reinforces the structure: Be a source of inspiration to others. Be the star to shine light on others and afford them the grace to flourish as their true selves. Remember, people want to feel wanted and respected. Serve to serve.

Be confident: Take the often dreaded first steps to challenge the status quo of inequality, unhappiness, discrimination, among others.

Have Integrity: Who you are when no one is watching is paramount. Character is often a leader's most valuable commodity.

Love thy neighbour: Tolerance and diversity are essential. But without an appreciation of who we are how can we co-exist to reach out and understand our neighbours? When we appreciate our uniqueness, we are better able to reach out to others - perceived to be different from us.

I am also enthused by the writings of the famous Latin American philosopher and medical doctor Don Miguel Ruis, that emphasize four agreements which I also subscribe to:

Find your rhythm: Live your dream. Take care of yourselves, fill yourself up, and be kind to yourself.

Be impeccable with your word: Start with yourself and keep your word to self and others.

Do not take anything personally: Understand people's point of view.

Do not make assumptions. There are infinite ways or forms of who we can be.

Always do your best: Put your ideas into action. Be present in the moment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I believe the world needs more Sarah Ntiros, Joyce Mpangas and Rhoda Klemas and many other outstanding women in our history.

Secondly, there are infinite possibilities of the human potential to dream and break new ceilings.

Thirdly, pillars in society have a responsibility to open more doors for others to access opportunities, resources, and freedoms, irrespective of the differences.

And finally, we need to apply ourselves for a better today and tomorrow and a future for everyone.

Together, we achieve more. I thank you all.