

**Mount Kenya**



**University**

**Unlocking Infinite Possibilities**

**REBUILDING LIVELIHOODS IN POST COVID-19**

**PERIOD**

***AN ONLINE PRESENTATION***

***BY***

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## **Preliminary**

I wish to start by thanking the Rotary Club of Nairobi South for inviting me to make this presentation which is basically a chance to share my own experiences with the Rotarians as well the TV47 viewers and other participants.

## **Introduction**

Upon receiving the invitation and seeing the topic which was allocated to me by my host I asked myself one question which is still in my mind even now.

The question has been, “What are the expectations of the Rotarians as they listen to this presentation?”

This presentation is therefore well reflected upon and it is what I believe is a good answer to my question.

However, before I proceed, I wish to first of all give an operational definition of the key concept in my presentation, namely, “**Livelihoods in Post-COVID19 Times**”.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The word ‘**livelihoods**’ especially from the COVID-19 perspective as this is where we are today, can be interpreted to

refer to many things but I will delve on only 3 aspects as follows;

- a) Livelihoods in post COVID – 19 businesses, employees’ and employers’ perspectives,
- b) Livelihoods in post COVID – 19 people’s psychosocial system, and,
- c) Livelihoods in post COVID – 19 community education support perspective.

### **1) Rebuilding Livelihoods in post COVID – 19 businesses, employees’ and employers’ perspectives**

To many families in Kenya and in Sub-Saharan Africa, the ‘livelihood’ concept is taken in many dimensions all of which actually refer to whatever binds the family together. Or in other words, that aspect which gives them a bond of togetherness.

From businesses or enterprises as well as employers’ and employees’ perspectives, ‘livelihoods’ refer to that opportunity which helps people put food on the table. This is the commonly shared situation to all.

In other words, in a simplistic way, livelihoods may actually refer to what will help people in a family to survive, that is, remain in good health and take care of each other, afford some shelter and food to survive.

COVID-19 seriously and adversely affected businesses and employment opportunities, left many employees without an income and hence threatened actual livelihoods. Even employers were not spared. Their businesses as their sources of income were wiped out and were all affected together with their employees.

In this regard, to the business owners, COVID-19 pandemic was a big challenge and they had to fight hard to remain afloat.

Obviously, many businesses of various magnitudes have been swept off their feet by this pandemic.

This has affected many employers (business owners), employees, as well as thousands of other people who depend on the employees who lost their jobs.

The post COVID-19 times are here with us with a new norm of doing things differently after having learnt several hard lessons.

What were the lessons learnt by both employers and employees? These lessons are as follows:

- a) Need for innovation and resilience. What made some businesses to close shop and others to survive? Survival of a business has been possible where both the employers and employees worked closely together to come up with innovations for survival. There was a need for adapting to the “new norm”. For instance, in universities, teaching and learning went online. In some hotels, the initial closures had adverse impact to them. They had to be innovative to ensure resilience for survival. You and I are aware of hotels that have not opened their doors up to date. Yet, others opened promptly. Innovation for resilience is the key issue.
- b) Need for fast decision making process and effecting these decisions. Business owners could not relax. They kept their managers busy and well consulted, made fast decisions and implemented them as a team.
- c) Need for diversification of income streams for sustainability. This applies to the employees as well as the employers as a way of cushioning the individual or

organization from total collapse. Always think of alternatives so that if the door is closed which is your other escape route? Have we as individuals and employers as well as organizations learnt our lessons well enough? Have we taken notes? Have we put together strategies for cushioning ourselves from such calamities in the future? This will be possible because of diversification that persons and organizations need to undertake in establishing many revenue streams.

d) The knowledge and appreciation that ‘nothing is permanent’ in this world. Who would have predicted at this time last year that the world at large will be where it is today? No one. Hence be ready for anything at any time. This therefore justifies the need of having alternatives in life. For example, for a farmer, what do you do in case of a drought? As the hotel owner, what do you do if you were told that such a calamity will strike again?

At MKU, we thank God that we have survived the pandemic but not without some bruises like every other

organization in the world. We have also realized and seen a full justification for diversification of our income revenue but we should do that without losing our focus on our core mandates of teaching, research and community engagement. MKU must shift to blended ways of doing university business including teaching as this is the best strategy for university resilience despite the heavy costs involved.

## **2) Rebuilding livelihoods in the perspective of post COVID** **– 19 people’s psychosocial system**

Ladies and Gentlemen, within this dimension of livelihoods at peoples’ psycho-social system, we note the serious breakdown of the psychosocial support system at the community level during the COVID-19 lockdown and try to address its remedy.

Before COVID-19 pandemic, the world at large was smoothly moving. It was business as usual. Communities and groups of people socialized and moved about very happily. We were all very social and we enjoyed our lives fully.

However, at the moment, following the COVID-19 pandemic impact and all the challenges that came with that, the social system was abruptly broken down. This has over the time led to a rise in suicides, murders and depression to unprecedented levels.

Several questions arise. Some of these questions are, “As we open up and get back to the ‘new norm’, and as businesses and schools reopen, how do we reinforce our psychosocial support?” “Will the depressed students and teachers go back to schools in that state of mind as depressed persons?”; “Are we helping them recover before they go back to school?”; “Is someone somewhere thinking of a remedy and an effective one at that?”

I was happy, for instance, when I read in the media the message from Dr Nancy Macharia to the teachers which said, “TSC Boss Macharia directs teachers to design psychosocial support for learners and parents ahead of school reopening.” But I asked myself one question, “who says that teachers have not been affected? Don’t they need psychosocial support as well? Who will give it to them?” Remember, the wise Latin saying, “You

cannot give what you do not have”. The psycho –social support system needs to be effected at all sectors of life throughout the country as a mandatory post COVID-19 pandemic control measure. Let us all remember that several cases of depression do not openly manifest themselves. So purposeful professional support is vital for all. This should be a mandatory consideration for Kenya and the world at large.

During the good pre-COVID-19 times, families and individuals used to get consolation and psychosocial support from their religious engagements, groupings, and ceremonies including weddings, baby showers, funerals, etc which were all very freely engaged in.

The abrupt stop imposed on these gatherings as a COVID-19 control measure affected communities adversely at group and individual levels. Sick relatives were not visited in hospitals and those who passed on did so in total seclusion from their loved ones. They were buried in a hurry which has caused serious psychological suffering in the communities that are still mourning the demise of their loved ones.

This is the same community whose vast number of members have lost jobs and so their full livelihoods have seriously been adversely affected.

The community is wounded and needs healing. Efforts to create jobs and for counselling must be made.

Unfortunately, home and group prayers have been discouraged due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this curtails the common psychosocial support machinery at the community level.

Therefore, we must all work together as individuals, the corporate sector, government and non-government agencies to ensure the number of counsellors at the community level is raised for enhanced counselling services.

The 'new normal' as it is called shows that, there are new practices that we need to embrace while other practices are no longer necessary. Let us have a discernment on what we need to take up again as useful cultural practices and what we need to shun off as unnecessary practices. For example, do we need physical graduation ceremonies? How long should the 'mourning periods' last upon the demise of a family member?

These are critical cultural realities to be re-considered as a way forward.

In this regard, Public – Private Partnerships must be engaged to address the community support system at all levels.

### **3) Rebuilding Livelihoods at the Educational Level**

I will consider education at two dimensions, formal education in schools and colleges and non-formal education or community based education acquired at home and within the non-school settings.

Ladies and Gentlemen, during the pre-COVID-19 period (that is prior to March 20<sup>th</sup> 2020 and before, everything went on very well and it was all business as usual to each one of us. Everyone led a routine life where children went to schools, teachers taught, parents ensured that children were at school and no one would ever dream of a possible disruption of a magnitude such as we have experienced today.

Due to the COVID-19 everyone stayed at home. Children, their parents and neighbours all stayed at home. Schools and colleges have been shut down for a prolonged period of over 6 months. Parents were confused by the lockdown and wondered what to do with their children at home. Cases of childhood pregnancies, girl child abuse at the family and community levels and other vices were witnessed at an unprecedented levels.

### **Lessons learnt from education sector's perspective**

- a) Parents should never forget that they have a primary role of taking care of their children as they belong to them and not to their teachers.
- b) Communities must put together their resources to support children and youth whether there is a pandemic or not. At all times, we must be ready with proper structures to ensure children are safe at home and at school.
- c) Children and youth must be helped to feel as part of the family and community at all times.
- d) Community-based education is a reality that needs to be embraced by all. The COVID-19 period led to the disruption of many things but most of the time the

communities did not own up. Hence, a vital Question to consider is who will offer the much needed community-based education? Systems must be put in place for this even upon full resumption of schools' and colleges' life. It will be recalled that the Teachers Service Commission had at one time guided their teachers on ways of delivering community based education to the learners while they were at home. Unfortunately, this great idea never saw the light of the day. We must not give up.

To enable proper community based education to take off and thrive, the following must be accomplished urgently.

- a) The grabbed recreational facilities need to be reclaimed and be made available for youth, children and aged persons' use as a vital component in the community life.
- b) Where are the social halls? Who is using them? Can we have more of them at each community as the venue for community-based education in the post COVID-19 period?
- c) Schools and colleges as well as communities at large must invest in ICT to enable online connectivity and this

needs to be an ever ongoing process to support formal education as well as the community-based learning.

d) Once more, Public – Private Partnerships must be engaged to address the community support system at all levels.

#### **4) Conclusion**

As a conclusion, I wish to quote the words of Professor David Denyer (2017) from Cranfield School of Management, Cranfield University who wrote the following words, “Organizational Resilience is the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and prosper”<sup>1</sup>. So let all the employers, managers, policy makers and all leaders pay attention to this need. All employees and persons in the society must also be helped to have this resilience for personal and group survival amidst adversities.

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<sup>1</sup> Denyer, D. (2017). Organizational Resilience: A summary of academic evidence, business insights and new thinking. BSI and Cranfield School of Management.

I wish all Kenyans a successful re-energizing of ourselves as we look forward into the future to embrace the new norm and ensure we take advantage of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Let us also pray that the pandemic gets eradicated and we all rebuild our livelihoods to higher levels for the good of the society at large.

**THE END**

**THANKS FOR YOUR AUDIENCE**

**Prof. Simon Gicharu**