

POSITIVE ECONOMY FORUM

San Patrignano, 7-8 April 2016

Positive Education: **Positive universities are responsible universities that are concerned about the well-being of their students and future generations. What kind of innovations do we have that improve well-being at university?**

Intervention: Rev. Dr. Steven Payne, OCD (Principal, Tangaza University College, Nairobi, Kenya)

Your Excellencies Letizia Moratti, Stefano Bonaccini, Andrea Gnassi, Jacques Attali, H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, David Thorne, Stefania Giannini, distinguished fellow panelists, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed....

I want to begin with an expression of deep gratitude to the organizers for their invitation to the Positive Economy Forum. I am deeply honoured to be here among you today, to contribute on this round table discussion on the theme of positive knowledge and innovations in universities that contribute to the well-being of students and future generations.

To be honest, I am an unlikely participant here, because I have no training or experience in politics, economics, business or the social sciences. Instead, my doctoral studies were in systematic theology and my area of specialization is spirituality! But by an unusual turn of events four years ago I became the Principal of Tangaza University College in Nairobi, where we host a very fruitful collaboration with ALTIS (the Graduate School of Business and Society of the Catholic University of Milan) and more recently with the E4Impact Foundation, a partnership between ALTIS, Securfin and major Italian industries. (I want to thank David Cheboryot, the coordinator of this programme at Tangaza, for his help in preparing these remarks.) And the chair of the E4Impact Foundation, Madame Letizia Moratti, is also the cofounder of this Positive Economic Forum here in Italy, among her many other accomplishments. So we have an important link with you. My experience at Tangaza and in connection with E4Impact have convinced me more than ever that such partnerships and collaborations must be a key component in a university's efforts to promote positive social change.

Allow me to tell you something about Tangaza. It began 30 years ago when the diocesan bishops of Kenya decided they had no more room in their seminaries for the Kenyan candidates from religious congregations, and encouraged the congregations to start something of their own. So we began as a small school of theology known then as the "Theological Centre for Religious." But even at the outset, the late Cardinal Otunga, archbishop of Nairobi, encouraged the founders to think more broadly, and to be open to training all sorts of people for all sorts of service in the church and society. Over the following decades, various institutes were added to our college, one after the other – Institutes of Social Ministry in Mission, Spirituality and Religious Formation, Education, African Studies, Social Communication, Youth Studies and Leadership and Management.

At first these were intended mainly to expand the training opportunities for the seminarians, but gradually our vision expanded to include holistic training for a wide range of servant leaders, from

priests and sisters to catechists and secondary-school teachers, from those working with children and refugees to those in the media and commerce, and so much more. Our students have included bishops, administration police, members of parliament and business leaders – as well as many poor youth from the slums. As our mission statement says, we strive to “provide holistic formation programmes to prepare servant leaders to transform the church and society. Tangaza is committed to providing an all-round quality education in an environment that promotes excellence in teaching and learning, research and scholarship as well as ethical and integral development.” And despite our relatively small size, because the many participating religious congregations send their students and teachers to us from all over Africa and beyond, we have perhaps the most diverse membership of any tertiary-level educational institution in Kenya. In a part of the world still struggling with tribalism and negative ethnicity, Tangaza College provides an outstanding example of the positive synergy that arises when such a variety of cultures and backgrounds are joined together toward a common purpose.

As in many parts of Africa today, Kenyan higher education is going through a difficult transition period. Education is key part of the nation’s “Vision 2030” development agenda, and there has been an explosion of new universities within the last 10 years. But the quality levels are often far below target, and lecturers with doctoral degrees are still too few. Academic research is still quite limited. Every week one hears of a Kenyan campus being closed because of student strikes or failure to meet appropriate standards. Meanwhile, those aspiring to public office are now required to have suitable degrees, and many are flocking to the universities, but there are often serious questions about their academic credentials. And this is the challenging arena that Tangaza will be entering as it applies for a charter to become recognized as an autonomous Kenyan university.

What, then, are some of the innovations and initiatives that Tangaza brings to this particular social context?

First, we are committed to a preferential option for the poor, in line with Gospel values. This is more than a popular slogan for us. Our “University Mtaani” outreach, for example, brings our diploma programme to the slums of Nairobi. We constantly struggle to keep our costs low and to provide numerous scholarships for needy students. Many are the first in their family to have attended college. We partner with numerous NGOs who are working to promote sustainable social transformation. And we constantly stress the importance of passing along the benefits; those of us who have been helped to receive an education, must in turn help others in need.

Second, we emphasize the holistic development of our students, whether they have just left secondary school or are older adults. For example, assisted by the School for New Learning of DePaul University in Chicago, we have pioneered innovative adult learning approaches in Kenya which build on the adult student’s prior experience and focus on developing measurable competencies rather than on rote memorization. We are small enough to be able to know each student as an individual, and to promote his or her growth not just intellectually but as a mature and well-rounded human being. There is a certain family “spirit” to Tangaza which is hard to

explain but is somehow captured in our motto: Teaching Minds, Touching Hearts, Transforming Lives.

Third, some of the particular values that go with this holistic development, in our particular social context, include the promotion of integrity, peace and justice, and respect for human dignity and the sanctity of life. As you may already know, Kenyans typically say today that the biggest dangers to their country come not from the external threat of terrorism but from the internal problems of corruption and tribalism, which seems to affect every level of business and government (even the universities) and which could have very grave consequences in the upcoming general election. Recent studies indicate that an alarming percentage of Kenyan youth say they are primarily concerned about acquiring wealth, without caring whether it is by honest or dishonest means. At Tangaza we have had numerous courses, workshops and conferences on these timely social issues. But the Tangaza family has also been very involved in concrete peacemaking activities, such as organizing a peace caravan for the youth, working with Catholic members of parliament, protecting the environment, promoting dialogue among different ethnic and religious communities, and fostering sustainable development projects. Some Kenyan universities post signs everywhere on campus declaring “this is a corruption-free zone” though their practice indicates otherwise; we believe that declaration must first be written in our hearts, and we try to form our students accordingly. We help our students focus on long-term gains that benefit everyone, rather than on immediate profits.

Fourth, we have learned that small institutions like Tangaza (with only 1200 students) can still have an enormous social impact through networking and partnerships. As I already noted, our institutes are linked with very many organizations and initiatives with a global outreach. With the African Sisters Education Collaborative we open educational opportunities for African religious women, who are at the forefront of providing leadership and social services in their local communities. Our Institute of Youth Studies is helping to train government employees who work with in the juvenile justice system. Our Institute of Social Ministry in Mission has partnered with several county governments and the Administration Police to provide specialized training that includes ethical formation. We have links with educational institutions and development initiatives across Africa and around the world, and these are increasing.

But let me conclude with a few words about our MBA programme in “Global Business and Sustainability – Social Entrepreneurship Track” (offered through ALTIS of the Catholic University of Milan), and the new E4Impact Initiative that I mentioned at the beginning. A growing new generation in Africa, that now includes 200 million people between the ages of 15 and 24, is creating the youngest continent on earth. But with a labour market that does not provide many opportunities for office jobs or wage employment, Africa’s youth are taking matters into their own hands by exploring entrepreneurship.

Africa is rising from the ashes of poverty and over-dependence on foreign aid to an expanding middle class and deepening domestic markets. These create many opportunities for the young entrepreneurs to engage creatively. Many of their startups are motivated by a desire to create

change in their local communities and provide practical bottom-up solutions for those often neglected by the national government and large corporations.

Africa is already home to some ingenious world-leading entrepreneurial initiatives. The boom in mobile phone usage has led to innovative consumer finance techniques such as M-Pesa, Mfarm and Lipisha (the last two are enterprises started by our MBA students). Creative business models and breakthroughs with innovative ideas are coming out of Africa and spreading across the continent, setting the scene for more innovative enterprises.

While young entrepreneurs are full of ideas and have little fear of failure, which is quite positive and encouraging, they find it difficult to build scalable and sustainable social enterprises. This is where Tangaza comes in as a 'positive university'. Since 2011, with the collaboration of the Catholic University of Milan, we have successfully run five editions of the E4Impact MBA programme. We have successfully graduated 140 social entrepreneurs who either launched their enterprises while attending our programme or scaled up those already existing.

Moreover, the E4 Impact programme has now spread to four other African countries: Ghana (Accra), Sierra Leone (Makeni), Uganda (Kampala), Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan). This year the MBA will also be launched in Dakar, Senegal in partnership with the Institut Supérieur de Management and in Mwanza, Tanzania in partnership with Saint Augustine University of Tanzania. In 2017 E4Impact MBA will reach also Ethiopia, South Africa and Rwanda. E4Impact aims to offer the MBA in at least 15 African countries by 2020, bringing a greater impact on the continent: the goal is to have over 3,000 entrepreneurs trained, 500 new enterprises and thousands of new jobs in the formal economy.

Inspired by such successful programmes and examples, more youthful Africans are choosing entrepreneurship over white-collar jobs, not only to make profits but also to contribute to Africa's social and economic transformation. In their own particular situations, these entrepreneurs are acting as catalysts for social and economic development and positive social transformation.

In conclusion, I want to thank the organizers and panelists for this opportunity, and all of you for your attention. If you would like to know more about the programmes I have mentioned, some brochures are available. Again, many thanks, *grazie mille*, or as we say in Kiswahili, "asanteni sana."