Sr. Lilian, Members of the Board, Teaching Staff, Supporting Staff, Graduating students, Members of the Clergy, Parents/ Guardians and all young friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel honoured and privileged to have been requested to be the Guest of Honour at the graduation ceremony of this prestigious school that I was once a student two decades ago. Arriving here yesterday, felt like I had just left the place briefly. Thank you all for the invitation and a wonderful welcome.

Graduation is a time of celebration and triumph and marks the end of one phase and beginning of the next phase. For the two (and to some six) years, that you’ve been at Kifungilo, you’ve heard all sorts of speeches. So I do not intend to tell you how your future would be nor how will the country look like in twenty years. I will share my own experience hopefully, twenty years from now you would still find some meaningful ideas from what I say today. These will not be ideas you learned in class but rather the learning you might have not noticed.

When I was much younger, i.e. about your age, I was happy to be admitted at Kifungilo and all other great schools. At young age being admitted in a great school is a big deal not just for us but also for our family. Then the next goal would be to do well in school and so forth. All these you would count them as success. At home, I grew up knowing that the elders go to work and children go to school. It was a simple fact. I never thought differently, until I started working in the field of research where I realised, in as much as this opportunity is given to children, few refuse to take it while most children will never even get offered the opportunity. You are lucky you’ve been blessed with supporting families, thank them and do not take their investment in you for granted. Be prepared for you will never know when opportunities would show up at the door steps.
You might have learned to use diaries to record what transpired in the day. This was helpful in assisting you to knowing your inner self and perhaps assisted in improving your writing skills. You now need to move to the next step and plan for what you want in the next couple of years. This plan should have both short term and long term goals. Put all these in writing and revisit them time to time (half a page). You will be amazed as to how effective you will be able to utilize time. Only with planning and repeatedly telling yourself your goals, you will come up with different ways to achieve them. The goal could be as small as learning a computer language, to as big as becoming a company secretary for an international organization you admire. You will need to be persistent to achieve your goals. I purposely did not say to achieve your dreams. Dreams when put in writing they become goals and when executed, they are named projects, you would later say you are living your dreams. Living your dreams needs planning, determination, perseverance and collaboration with other likeminded. Living your dreams may lead you to work for yourself, the government, academia, private organizations and communities. Private sector is the growing employer, you should aim to excel competitively. For some of you, your dreams would reward you generously and others not. You would need to shy away from fear by surrounding yourself with positive people. Taking the first step is very important in all projects you aim to undertake, do not procrastinate. Taking calculated risks would be useful. Some of the projects will be successful and some not. Learn from the unsuccessful projects and move on, do not dwell much on them. The most important part would be to **persistently plan to do what you love** regardless of rewards.

As you look forward to joining higher education and join the job market, I’ve three takeaways to share. First, the only person you can control at anytime is you. Second, be flexible and third pray.

With regards to controlling you, so far you have had a great environment of learning surrounded by supportive teachers, fellow students and parents. The teachers and parents created an environment to get the best out of you. Be the change you want to see in the world is a phrase we hear too often. Well, change starts within oneself. As a young woman going for higher learning most of the decisions would be taken by you and once taken you will have to stick to them. There will be no one following up on you as to whether you attended lectures/classes or not. There will be no one to follow up as to whether you are reading or not. All in all, at the end of the semester you will be examined and that’s it. Pass or fail is all on you. You must strive to be successful
by excelling in all you do by utilising fully your capabilities. Avoid as much as possible to depend on favours. Do not put in a mediocre efforts expecting excellence. This would be cheating yourself with short cuts and would not take you anywhere. Shortcuts deprive you the privilege to learn and adjust. In order to learn about oneself requires **utmost self-discipline** which you would also find very useful in the future once you start working.

The life at higher learning is enjoyable as long as you allow yourself to be flexible. Try as much as possible to fully utilise every hour in a day. When eating, eat well, when studying study well, when learning a new sport, learn well, when dancing, dance well, and even when sleeping, sleep well. Kifungilo exposed you to different tastes of foods, I remember the likes of makande and mchweo (maize and potatoes), should you go abroad you would need to acquire/ adopt to different taste. For instance in Europe and America you would eat lots of bread (the name changing in accordance to the filling used and temperature) while in Asia you would eat lots of noodles and rice. And at our local high learning institutions you would buy your own food. You will need to invest time and learn how to eat healthy. At the higher learning institutions, in as much as you would want to study, in addition plan to join team sport, learn a new sport, set time to work on your hobby, volunteer to organize events like conferences, workshops and join a club for a cause you support for example environment club, child rights club. Go for study tours in other higher learning institutions, that is, try to meet as many people as you can. The more you have on your plate, the more you force yourself to frankly prioritize and thus allot time accordingly. As a bonus, you will learn all the different ways of saying no. Saying no diplomatically is a good art to acquire, especially given the high prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS at higher learning institutions. Learning never ends, in all these spheres you will meet people and teams composed of different personalities. These skills are useful when joining the job market. Flexibility allows you to learn **how to manage your time** while working on different issues facing you at hand.

Praying in as much as this is the third take away, it is the most important one. Create a habit to set aside time to speak to the Almighty God. You might have not liked waking up early to attend Mass while in school. I am not saying go to church or mosque every day, but rather try your best to create the habit of speaking to God in good
times then it will be easier even when tough times come to accept different situations in front of you. In achieving your goals, *peace within yourself* is crucial.

Take heart, do not be afraid, the world out there is waiting to receive and execute all the great ideas from your innovative minds. For starters, it is true some of you would be voting for the next President, which means you are citizens of Tanzania and your voice would be among those counted representing the nation. Choose wisely. It is a great honour and privilege to become a citizen able to make decision, e.g. vote, run for office. This well-deserved civil right is very powerful. With power comes responsibility. Corruption deprives Tanzanians of quality services and on time provision of inputs to the needy. You’ve proved to yourself, your teachers, friends, parents and guardians that you are capable of taking up the education challenge. The complex challenges in the real world would be greatly solved with your assistance in collaborating with other Tanzanians in their respective working stations. Try to always keep out of trouble but yet again when in trouble inform your parents/guardian on time. Do not deny or hide the problem as this would complicate matters. Remember that your parents and guardians love you unconditionally. Yet again *when you make a mistake live up to your action*, admit, do the required mending and move on.

The friends you made at Kifungilo are your friends forever, from those in form one to form six. You would continue to make more friends but do not forget your friends from Kifungilo. Make the habit of communicating even if its once a year. Some of your closer friends now will take a different path in life and you would go different ways, few would take the same path with and some would come back in your path after many years. Receive all your friends with an open heart. Do not question when some walk away as they will be providing space for new ones to come. Enjoy what life has to offer. With advancement in technology and social media you can reach all over the world in few minutes. Technology is out there to simplify our way of communicating and should not become a goal in itself. If necessary create a timetable that you’ll allow yourself to check the social media for instance looking at WhatsApp at 7.30 to 7:45am then 1:00pm to 1:15pm then 5:15pm to 5:30pm. Using only these rough estimates shows that one would spend 45 minutes on WhatsApp in a day. When added up, in two
days that's a total of one and half hours thus is a months that a total of 22 hours and a half. That is almost a day in a month is lost of WhatsApp alone. We must learn to use technology for an intended purpose otherwise we will become the slave of technology. And we would end up talking about our dreams and never being able to live them. Make a deliberate effort to have decent time with family and friends away from your gadget, by organizing events together, like running errands, organizing picnics, cooking with a family member and catching up.

After these few words, allow me to share my story hoping it will provide some inspiration.

In 1995, my biggest dream was to travel and with that I wanted to be a pilot. To be able to become a pilot I needed to undertake the PGM combination (Physics Geography and Mathematics). Unfortunately, the course was not offered in the year I graduated. Second best alternative, I decided to go for EGM (Economics, Geography and Mathematics), in our class out of ten only two women. This cut off my aim of becoming a pilot but offered me an opportunity to learn new things. I started loving economics as it offered a combination of statistics and mathematics. During my first degree out of 34 students only 8 were women. In addition to being an economics student, I represented the University of Dar es Salaam in higher learning institutions competition in volleyball, netball, javelin, shot put, and discus. Also together with fellow students, we organized International Students’ Week in Tanzania. A typical day at the University would include at least a lecture and a seminar. The hard part was scheduling my own self reading.

At the end of my first degree (bachelors), I wanted to learn more about the world economics. I excelled and was admitted to Harvard University for my masters (i.e. second degree). I found myself in a program with 78 fellow students from more than 30 countries, with about fifty-fifty men and women. My best friends, Kadidia was from Bamako, Mali and Mona from Lebanon. Life at Harvard was completely different from the University of Dar es Salaam. Even more self-discipline was required as we had to prepare before classes, which meant I had to work harder. But even with this I had time to still play volleyball, go out with friends and attend concerts. The urge of wanting to apply what I've learned brought me back to Tanzania. I met the Executive Director of REPOA who offered me a research job. I am still a researcher to date. In 2007, I got an opportunity to go for my PhD in the
Netherlands. I worked for my PhD in Vietnam and Mtwar. Again as in Harvard, we were a group of PhD students from 8 countries; I was the only woman in the PhD program.

I am now at REPOA, continuing with research work using statistics, mathematics and economics applying the knowledge and skills acquired since Kifungilo. As a researcher, I work with different colleagues sometimes from within REPOA and lots of other times with colleagues from outside REPOA, both in Tanzania and abroad. In the research process, I'm required to be on time and flexible to accommodate needs of the team in order to meet deadlines, facilitate training, participate in dialogues and organize workshops and seminars in Tanzania and outside Tanzania.

At the same time have to spend time with family and friends, also engage in my hobbies and learn new things. Together with friends, we invest in small scale projects. Up until today, I am still in daily contact with my classmates Mkunde and Harriet who are now working as an Optician and Head the Customer Care respectively. Some others we at least talk weekly.

Lastly, let me thank Kifungilo Management for the invitation, I hope the graduates have picked a word or two. I wish all the graduates success the world can offer. To our teachers I continue to thank you for continuing to shape the Future of Tanzania. To parents and guardians, God Bless you for investing wisely on your children and congratulations. To my fellow Kifungilo Alumnae and supporting staff Na Tulenge Juu!!

Thank you

Blandina Kilama
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