66TH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE
30th September - 6th October, 2023
Accra, Ghana

CPA COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

Inaugural Emilia Monjowa Lifaka Lecture

Date: Monday 2 October 2023

Time: 19:00 - 20:15

Location: Accra International Conference Centre, Ghana.

The Impact of a life of Service and Civic Duty

Introduction/Greeting

Honourable Speakers,

Honorable Members of Parliament,

Distinguished guests,

Dear Observers,

Members of the Press,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all warmly to the **Inaugural Emilia Monjowa Lifaka Lecture, in honour of** the late Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee and former Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Cameroon.

Allow me from the outset to thank the CPA for the invitation and privilege to deliver this inaugural lecture. I am indeed humbled and honoured because I have no doubt in my mind that there are more qualified persons than myself to undertake this task.

As daunting as it may seem, I will strive to discharge this lofty duty to the best of my abilities in the hope that my successors will do even better.

In the course of preparing this lecture, I could not help but wonder if I really have what it takes to deliver an inaugural lecture in honour of the former

deputy speaker of blessed memory. It also afforded me the time and opportunity to reflect on the role/ mission of a public speaker.

My research led me to Aristotle, who framed public speaking, or rhetoric as it was called at the time, ***as the art of persuasion, the early study of which would lead a rhetorician to discover all means of persuasion within a given case.***

This also led me to reflect on some of the messages that have influenced my personal journey, and indeed, persuaded me. Among these are some of the messages shared by the Late Lifaka herself during her tenure as Deputy Speaker at Cameroon's National Assembly and Chair of the CPA. I could tell, without a shadow of doubt, that she was passionate about the CPA. The key takeaway is the belief that the very foundation of public speaking is rooted in advocacy and civic engagement.

Today's form of civic engagement involves seeking out and creating opportunities to listen as well as to be heard, whether speaking at your local city council meeting, Parent Teacher Association, or Congress. This moment of sharing is an example of such opportunities.

The theme of this year's conference is 'The Commonwealth Charter 10 years on: Values and Principles for Parliaments to Uphold' and coincides with the 10th anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter. It is felicitous to highlight one overarching value which not only captures the life and the legacy of Hon. Lifaka and her roles within the CPA and the National Assembly of her country, but, which I believe should serve as a beacon to you who have been elected into office.

That value is Service.

If you are a Member of Parliament, your constituents may often bring their concerns to you, and you may also act in a constituent matter which might result in priority attention from government departments.

If a matter is particularly urgent or serious, the Member may approach the relevant Minister directly, or may even bring the matter before the Parliament by laying the matter to the responsible Minister.

The Member may also sponsor a petition about the issue in question.

All these actions require commitment, and most importantly, dedication to SERVICE.

Hon. Emilia Monjowa Lifaka was elected Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee in November 2017 at the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh and undertook a wide range of activities for the CPA in governance and parliamentary development. She had previously served as CPA Vice-Chairperson from 2016 to 2017; CPA Africa Regional Representative between 2015 and 2017; Conference Coordinator of the 60th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in Cameroon in 2014; and from 2007 to 2021 as the Coordinator of CPA International Activities for the National Assembly of Cameroon. She was passionate about her service to the CPA.

Commented [BA1]: Betty needs to work a bit more on this.

She was also a holder of three National distinctions:

- Knight of the Cameroon National Order of Merit
- Officer of the Cameroon National Order of Merit
- Knight of the National Order of Valor

She was a single mother with two adult boys. I had the privilege of meeting with one of her boys, Adolf who is here.

(Betty asks Adolf to stand and we recognised)

Adolf has kindly shared details about his mother which inspired this lecture, and I am proud that her life has inspired his own life and has led him to also commit to embracing opportunities to serve.

Her Education enabled her to serve her nation, to serve the Commonwealth and in her own quest to support young women, she mentored several women's groups and took a particular interest in the training of young women

through the Fako West Scholarship Programme. This is a selfless act of service and one which has contributed to educating those who otherwise may not be able to afford it. Yet,their education would ultimately mean they will become better citizens and hopefully, they too, will serve their communities.

The work of the Commonwealth Education Trust

As a volunteer, engaging in community service can vastly widen one's perspective and outlook on life.

However, the concept and the idea of volunteering is one which many within my community did not understand. So I would often get asked by my friends and family,

“Betty, do you mean you are working for free?”

However, by being placed in a situation that might be unfamiliar to us we can grow as a person and cultivate a sense of how the world operates out of our comfort zone and environment. But more importantly, we are committing ourselves to an act of service. Service to others but ultimately, serving ourselves, our values and principles.

In 2019, just before COVID 19 made its way to the UK shores, I was invited to attend an event by an organisation I had never heard about: the Commonwealth Education Trust.

After this event, the then CEO, Kat Thorne, invited mefor a coffee in London and after a chat, I was asked if I would be glad to serve as a Trustee on the board of the Commonwealth Education Trust.

The decision to serve on the board would be one which will take me on an incredible journey and one which has led me to this very moment today the 2nd of October in Accra. I am extremely grateful for that opportunity that kickstarted my life mission of service .

Earlier on, I spoke about my preparation for this lecture and one of the abilities which are vital to communicate effectively at events like this conference, and which we often take for granted. It is our ability to Read.

Learning to read is a milestone in every child's life. My ability to read means you are all able to understand me, to connect with my journey.

Reading is a foundational skill.

All children should be able to read by age 10. Reading is a gateway for learning, as the child progresses through school – and conversely, an inability to read constrains opportunities for further learning.

In recent years, it has become clear that many children around the world are not learning to read proficiently. Even though most children are in school, a large proportion are not acquiring fundamental skills.

Moreover, 260 million children are not even in school. This is the leading edge of a learning crisis that undermines countries' efforts to build human capital and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

On 8 April 1938, in Kumasi in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), a set of twins would be born to a Ghanian family.

One of the twins was Kofi Annan. Mr Annan would join the United Nations in 1962 and later serve as its Secretary General. Kofi Annan is a sterling example of service. As such, it would be remiss of me, standing here before you in Ghana, to not pay a resounding tribute to Kofi Annan or say thank you to this land for blessing the world with such an extraordinary legacy.

Kofi Annan was instrumental in helping set the stage for the set of 17 universal sustainable development goals and the 169 targets we have today. His vision was to set out a blueprint to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as exceeding their ambition.

The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is committed to working with its member states and partners in their effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, and help fulfil a pledge to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

To spotlight this ***Learning Crisis***, the World Bank and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics jointly constructed the concept of ***Learning Poverty*** and an accompanying indicator.

Learning poverty means being unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10. This indicator combines schooling and learning metrics: it begins with the share of children who haven't achieved minimum reading proficiency (as measured in schools) and is adjusted by the proportion of children who are out of school (and are assumed not able to read proficiently).

Consequently, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, quality education for all, eliminate learning poverty (SDG 4.1.1 1b) and increase teacher training (4c).

When children cannot read, it's usually a clear indication that school systems aren't well organized to help children learn in other areas such as math, science, and the humanities either.

And although it is possible to learn later in life with enough effort, children who don't read by age 10 – or at the latest, by the end of primary school – usually fail to master reading later in their schooling career.

I am currently serving as the CEO but I always prefer to be called (Servant in Chief) at The Commonwealth Education Trust. We know that teachers have more impact in reducing this number and improving learning outcomes than any other factor.

The right investment in valuable Teacher Professional Development leads to higher literacy and numeracy levels, increasing the prospects of thousands of children worldwide.

Fewer teachers would leave the profession, thanks to higher staff morale, and communities would become more developed and enriched.

As an accredited Commonwealth organisation, we support both SDG4 and the Commonwealth Charter by providing teachers in under resourced settings with a low-cost, digital, professional development (TPD) solution

Our impact model is based on 4 core pillars.

WE BUILD through our ed-Tech, award winning platform, Teach2030. Easy-to-use and low data, all teachers receive contextualised, assessed, and certified materials. Scalable and designed for whole school or independent learning, we encourage TPD to become standard practice, ensuring all continue to develop.

WE ADVISE, as we focus on increasing learning outcomes and classroom knowledge, bringing sustainable TPD to teachers, governments, NGOs and other organisations.

WE WORK TOGETHER through collaborating with worldwide partners - pooling knowledge and resources.

WE ELEVATE by celebrating our global community of teachers, empowering them to design innovative solutions for their classrooms and discuss their practice with fellow educators.

This is the leading edge of a learning crisis further exacerbated by the adverse impact of Covid 19 that jeopardizes countries' efforts to build human capital and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It stands in the way of nurturing future leaders.

Without foundational learning, students will fail to thrive later in school or when they join the workforce, and this will ultimately impact their ability to serve and awareness of civic duty

They will hardly be the next MP's, Speakers or leaders. We all have a role to play to help these children acquire the human capital they need to power their careers and economies once they leave school, or the skills that will help them become engaged citizens and nurture healthy, prosperous families. Importantly, a lack of foundational literacy skills in the early grades can lead to intergenerational transmission of poverty and vulnerability.

There is enough evidence that shortcomings in the quality and quantity of schooling are a leading contributor to this human capital deficit.

Before the COVID pandemic, 57 percent of children in low- and middle-income countries could not read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school. In in Sub-Saharan Africa, the rate was 86 percent. The dual shocks to education systems – school closures and the ensuing economic crisis – have only deepened this crisis.

Year of Youth and the Commonwealth

Why is this important to us you may ask? Well, the The Commonwealth is home of the majority of the world's youth demographic.

The Commonwealth's 56 member countries have a combined population of 2.5 billion people, of which more than 60% are under the age of 30.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2022, leaders declared 2023 as a year dedicated to youth-led action for sustainable and inclusive development. Year of Youth was officially launched in January 2023.

2023 coincides with the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth Youth Programme – established to deliver support for young people under the age of 30 to reach their full potential.

An invitation was extended to young changemakers, civil society and governments to work together towards a renewed vision for the Commonwealth: one that is secure, fair, and sustainable. The CET hopes that through our investment in teachers, we will be improving learning outcomes and encouraging young people to find solutions within their countries, where possible discourage them from making dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean. Give them a sense of hope.

Closing

Finally, allow me to offer a personal reflection.

I grew up in Cameroon. My mother became a teacher, and my father joined the police force.

After serving as a police officer, and having had five mouths to feed, my father took a bold step to write his GCSEs via correspondence via what was then the Rapid results college in the UK, seek admission at the university of New Hampshire, resign as a police officer and take a gamble at getting his first degree. After a year, my mother would join him, and both would eventually bag their degrees and return to Cameroon to serve the country they loved.

I have obviously benefitted from their ambition and though it was challenging studying in a low- and middle-income country, the fact that I am standing here is a testament to the transformative power of education, and of the teachers I have encountered.

October 5th is World Teachers Day. That is an important day for the CET and this year's theme is "The Teachers We Need for the Education We Want: The Global Imperative to Reverse the Teacher Shortage."

Bearing in mind the example of the life of Honorable Lifaka and her dedication to service and how we all have an important part to play in developing the communities, organisations and constituents we serve, I would like to pay special tribute to one teacher who impacted my life and who, in my opinion, mirrors the honour, the values and commitments that led guided the late Lifaka into a life of public service.

That is my secondary school teacher, Mr Bodylawson. Mr Bodylawson, my father, and I held a secret, which I can now safely reveal..

My father had handed me my school fees. Guess what! I foolishly squandered the money.

Then, on this fine day while I was in Biology class, the bursar came and informed me that the principal wanted to see me. I can assure you that it was a long walk. I admitted that there was little left of the money and profoundly apologised to both my dad and the principal and prayed my father would not share it with my mum.

I was sure that event would be a defining moment in my life. In addition to this, I was never a top student and now I was about to go down in my family's history (in addition to being a middle child) as the one who literally "ate" her schools fees, as we say back home.

Over the next three years, I would work hard and try to stay out of trouble and where possible away from Mr Bodylawson's gaze.

I never became a top student, but my grades did somewhat improve.

On graduation day, the most prestigious award is the principals award for most outstanding 6th form student. The person who got it usually also had earned the grades to go with it. So naturally, when my name was read out, I stared at the podium in utter disbelief.

One of the ways our courses The CET emphasises the importance of giving feedback which encourages a growth mindset. When teachers provide effective and honest feedback, it doesn't discourage the students but encourages creative thinking and better learning.

Technology can help support teachers remotely, but it certainly won't be enough on its own. We All have a crucial role to play and technology is a tool that policymakers, can use under the right conditions to enhance support to teachers.

Commented [EAA2]: Not sure if this is meant to be here or not, as it is incomplete

It is vital to acknowledge that the 80 million teachers world-wide cannot be expected to be superheroes: we must build an education-supportive environment where the work of teachers is amplified outside the educational institution.

Secretary-General The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC at the last Commonwealth Heads of Government speaking after her reappointment said:

“To seek high office is a profound act of service and I want to commend my colleagues who also sought to serve.”

May our service, in our various spheres, continue to be selfless, impactful and truly make a difference in the lives of those who serve.

Thank you all.