**BOTSWANA OPEN UNIVERSITY (BOU)**

**2nd GRADUATION CEREMONY**

**FRIDAY 22RD NOVEMBER 2019**

**DITSHUPO HALL, FAIRGROUND HOLDINGS, GABORONE**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**By**

**THE MINISTER OF TERTIARY EDUCATION, RESEARCH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**DR. DOUGLAS LETSHOLATHEBE**

**THEME: Embracing Technology-enhanced Open and Distance Learning**”

**Salutations (in order of precedence)**

**Introduction**

1. It gives me great pleasure to have been invited as Guest Speaker at this momentous event, being the second graduation ceremony of the Botswana Open University (BOU). Firstly, allow me to express my sincerest compliments to and applaud the BOU Class of 2019 for their achievement which we are celebrating today. This day marks the culmination of the hard work that has over the last few years gone into your studies. Congratulations!!!
2. Let me also say this is a historical event for me. As you know, I assumed the position Minister of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology on 6th November 2019 and I am delighted to be here this morning witnessing the delivery of the mandate of the Ministry that I am leading. It is a wonderful welcome for me.
3. It is equally a challenge as you, BOU Council and BOU Management and Staff, are saying to me, this is the standard we have set and you certainly expect me to facilitate you so that you can do even far much better as an institution. I pledge my support and guidance as we endeavour to make BOU a major player in Open and Distance Education in Botswana and beyond.
4. Distinguished Chancellor, the end of the year 2017 marked the birth of the Botswana Open University, through an Act of Parliament (Act No. 13 of 2017). This was a result of the gradual transformation of the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) which had been orchestrated since the inception of the College in 2000.
5. Judging by the cumulative enrolments and throughputs that have been achieved ever since, BOCODOL, and now BOU, has impacted quite significantly the lives of many Batswana through open and distance education mode. For this, the institution deserves commendations.
6. Director of Ceremonies, with respect to the theme for this year’s graduation ceremony: “**Embracing Technology-Enhanced Open and Distance Learning,**” I am readily sold to the idea of leveraging technology in every area of performance, especially in the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).
7. The 4IR is characterized by technological developments which will inevitably impact upon the provision of education, training and skills development. Therefore, the importance of offering technology driven products and services cannot be overemphasized. The digital world is here with us and we have to embrace such development in our business processes, including the delivery of education.
8. As a country, we need to position ourselves in order to take advantage of the opportunities arising from developments in the technological sphere. The provision of education, training and skills development will benefit greatly from the way we embrace technology.
9. Director of Ceremonies, it is also worth noting that the theme for this event amplifies the strategic intent for the BOU 2019-23 Strategic Plan, which states: “***by 2023 BOU will be an innovative open university recognized for its technology-enhanced programmes, relevant research and societal impact***”. One gets a clear sense that this institution intends to lay a foundation for the eventual realisation of the goal of leveraging technology.
10. I wish, therefore, to advise that this year’s graduation theme should form part of a recurring message that accentuates the role of technology in the effective execution of the BOU mandate.
11. Embracing technology in Open and Distance learning will go a long way towards widening access to education as well as promoting entrepreneurship and employability skills. Online provision of learning can greatly empower learners. Learning can be engaged with both synchronously and asynchronously, offering flexibility for those who cannot attend face-to-face sessions due to work commitments, caring responsibilities or disability. It is also worth noting that when technology is used optimally, it can facilitate a seamless learner experience.
12. Distinguished Chancellor, as we diversify our economy away from diamonds, we need to refocus on ensuring the realization of a knowledge based-economy. The question then is: What do we need to put in place to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in transforming into a knowledge based-economy? It is without doubt that at the epicentre of such an economy will be an intellectual capital that is resilient, adaptable and well capacitated to embrace the challenges that will inevitably precipitate from the global race for competitiveness. One of the critical steps that we need to do is to embrace modern technology in the way we do things. I am therefore very pleased to note that BOU is already part of this journey.
13. Director of Ceremonies, there are certain descriptors that better describe open and distance learners and these being: resilience; intrinsic motivation; determination; purpose driven; goal oriented.  I wish to indicate that these are the same values that we need to embrace and live by as a nation in order to transform our economy from resource based to knowledge driven economy. It is my earnest desire that these soft skills can become an integral part of our culture.
14. For some of the learners, it is possible that they initially had to contend with a new mode of learning which is technology mediated. For some, they had to invest in acquiring technological gadgets that would enable them to pursue their studies.
15. All these experiences reflect resilience; intrinsic motivation; determination; being purpose driven; being goal oriented. I want to commend all the graduates for displaying these attributes. You have fought a good fight. Once more congratulations!
16. My Government is committed to creating conditions conducive for an inclusive economy. As we go about our business of service delivery, we need to take conscious decisions to involve our communities in the activities that empower them to actively participate in economic activities regardless of their socio-economic status. This is meant to achieve the economic welfare and well-being of our communities. Our people must be deliberately empowered to be active players in the economy. To this end, I believe Open and Distance Learning institutions in Botswana should play an important role in bringing up the required human resource development both by promoting the knowledge-based and skill-based education and by protecting them against all anti-social activities.
17. Consistent with what I have just said, I want to point out that we need to fully appreciate the value chain that goes with ODL. I am thinking here about content development, content packaging and content delivery.
18. I have no doubt that there are opportunities for our techno savvy youth to find space in this value chain. I wish, therefore, to appeal to BOU leadership to look at how the provision of ODL can be part of our economic diversification drive. Who knows, some of the gadgets or apps can be developed by our very own people.
19. It is therefore important for BOU to partner with our research and innovation institutions like the Botswana Innovation Hub and Botswana Institute for Technology, Research and Innovation (BITRI) in coming up with locally developed technological solutions that can be used to support the delivery of ODL in Botswana.
20. Director of Ceremonies, Vision 2036 is articulate on our quest to transform Botswana from a mid-income to a high-income country by the Year 2036. This is a daunting and yet challenging agenda we have set for ourselves. Therefore, we need to be aggressive in pursuit of this our noble goal. Our transformation to high-income status will be based on the transition from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy.
21. The President of Botswana, Dr Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, has established a National Transformation Team that will explore transformational and radical changes that will enable the country to move from a resource-based economy to an efficiency-driven economy characterized by innovation and value add of every economic driver.
22. The Transformation Team will develop a comprehensive National Transformation Strategy (NTS) that will act as the single strategy reference document, which will be subject to periodic reviews to reflect emerging local and global trends. The NTS will provide a framework for coordinated and aligned national reference for strategies for the Government, the private sector and all stakeholders, including mechanism for resolving policy conflicts and successful implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.
23. I want to encourage BOU to be part of the national transformation agenda. A careful reading of your theme of today which speaks to: “**Embracing Technology-enhanced Open and Distance Learning,**” attests to this.
24. Director of Ceremonies as I conclude my address, let me remind the graduands that as you step out into the world of work with the knowledge you have gained, bring out the investment into your families, work places and into the Nation as a whole so that there is return on investment to those who supported you in various ways.
25. I therefore encourage you to dig deeper within yourselves to evince your various talents and knowledge and play a meaningful role to the economy of Botswana. I want to also encourage you to consider preparing yourselves to be part of the human capital that BOU can turn to in delivering its mandate.
26. You have already embraced technology in your learning and you are better placed to serve as facilitators in the delivery of Open and Distance Learning.
27. Finally, congratulations and may the Good Lord bless you and keep you.

PULA! PULA! PULA!.