

Speech by the Governor Dr. Wahome Gakuru during the Official Opening of the Second County Assembly of Nyeri on 28th September 2017

Mr Speaker

It's now a little over a month since my inauguration as the third Governor of Nyeri County. I am delighted for this opportunity to share the aspirations and plans that my government has for the people of Nyeri in the next five years. First and foremost let me begin by extending my heartfelt congratulations to you, Mr Speaker on your election, and to the honorable members of this Assembly for being entrusted with the honor of representing the people of Nyeri.

As we are all aware our people have immense expectations from us. I hope that we shall work together towards not only meeting their expectations, but exceeding them. Indeed, as I have embarked on various activities across the county in the recent past, I have been reminded of the promises we made during our campaigns and the underlying hope that the people have in our government to “**change the way things have been !**”.

Allow me to bring to your attention the fact that we have already initiated the elaborate and comprehensive process of spelling out our next five years' transformative path into an Integrated Development Plan in accordance with the provisions of section 108 of the County Governments Act, 2012. Nevertheless, I will provide a broad outline of the strategic direction that my government proposes to take and the legislative support that we will need from you to achieve our agenda.

Our promises are anchored on three overarching themes – ***Ukuria*** (Economic Growth), ***Uigiririki*** (Accountability) and ***Waragania*** (Transparency). We believe that our beloved county will experience economic growth if we support our people to attain the basic economic and social rights enshrined in Article 43 of our Constitution, Vision 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Jubilee Party Manifesto.

We will work towards ensuring that food security is assured; standards of our county healthcare system are uplifted, and that clean and safe water is accessible across the county. With such safety nets, we envisage that productivity of our enterprising people will be enhanced. We shall focus on tapping the areas where we have a competitive advantage, including but not limited to coffee and tea production, horticulture, dairy production, tourism promotion and advancement, value addition and manufacturing, and youth enterprise.

Transparency and Accountability are key pillars of our national and public service values and principles. We will institutionalize accountability structures throughout the entire county public service by application of tested tools, beginning with mundane elements like staff identification tags to performance contracting and feedback hotlines. We will reward and celebrate excellence in performance while at the same time sanctioning poor performance. We shall run an open government. We intend to share information on a timely basis and in such a manner that accords the public opportunity to provide feedback.

Honorable members,

Our county's main engine for economic growth remains agriculture. Over 55% of our people are directly employed in the agricultural sector. Ironically, the sector has only been receiving an average of 5% of the development budget over the last four years. Definitely, the underfunding has stifled extension services and negated productivity. From the onset, we will prioritize agriculture (including livestock, veterinary, and fisheries subsectors) through increased and refocused budgetary allocation, retooling of staff, provision of subsidized farm inputs, provision of equipment and infrastructure to enhance storage of produce and reduce post harvest losses as well as increasing value through processing.

These initiatives along the agricultural value chain will be targeted at all our main crops and livestock areas and therefore benefit farmers across the county. From the onion farmer in Kiawara, the Youth Group engaging in bee keeping in Othaya; the potato farmer in Kabaru; the coffee farmer in Gichira; the tea farmer in Magutu, the fish farmer in Muthinga, to the dairy farmer in Gathukimundu.

Already, we have proposed to increase the budgetary allocation to the agricultural sector in Financial Year 2017/2018 from KShs 100 million to KShs 500 million (half a billion shillings). Part of this kick start investment is aimed at enabling mobility of our agricultural extension officers to provide their services at the farm level. Additionally, we plan to address critical gaps in productivity through applying pragmatic approaches that are backed by research evidence. For instance, use of a combination of lime and organic manure to moderate soil acidity and enrich our soils with macro and micro nutrients, has been demonstrated to increase productivity for coffee, Irish potato and maize. Considering that production for these three crops currently stands at 28%, 50% and 33% of the potential respectively, then these interventions will go a long way to boosting production.

We plan to revitalize the Agricultural Mechanization Services (AMS) particularly to support farmers in Kieni. The AMS unit has significant untapped potential in terms of land, equipment as well as highly trained staff. We will revive the equipment, explore options for cross collaboration with the water and roads sectors in terms of equipment utilization and ensure that the land available at the unit is properly applied for demonstration in agriculture and livestock production.

Similarly, we plan to scale up the capacity of Wambugu Agricultural Training Centre as a centre of excellence in training of farmers in collaboration with the national government. Our commitment to support the national government's initiative of establishing the Kenya School of Agriculture in Nyeri will not wane.

With regard to livestock, we will continue to support artificial insemination (AI) and countywide vaccination programs. We plan to extend our value addition support to the untapped area of skins and hides, and modernization of our abattoirs.

Our promise to make the county food secure is also premised on supporting the restoration of kitchen gardens at the small households level, encouraging farmers to diversify into small livestock such as rabbit keeping and bee keeping. We will support common interest groups to engage in such ventures.

Mr Speaker,

I recently joined one of our Water Service Providers- Nyeri Water and Sanitation Company- in celebrating its twentieth anniversary. This company has received numerous accolades of excellence in service delivery, which has earned our county the tag of **“the only place where you can safely drink water directly from the tap”**. This is the standard that my government wishes to see replicated across the county by all our other water service providers. Unfortunately, some of our providers are still reporting unacceptably high levels of Unaccounted for Water ranging from 50 to 60%. We plan to invest resources towards addressing this gap and increase connections to households especially in the under-served areas of Kieni and Mathira.

Towards increasing the acreage under irrigation and contributing to food security in the county, we will continue collaborating with the National Government to get the mega dams completed. At the same time, we plan to roll out our unique program for drilling boreholes beginning with two boreholes for every Ward in Kieni Constituency. I am glad to announce that the National Government, through the Cabinet Secretary for Water and Irrigation, has also embraced this program and offered to provide additional support by drilling two more boreholes for each of the eight Wards in Kieni Constituency and an additional two in Konyu Ward in Mathira. We estimate that this program will increase the area under irrigation by over 3,000 acres.

Being the home county of the most celebrated environmentalist of our time, the late Prof. Wangari Maathai, environmental conservation will also be a top priority for my administration. We plan to collaborate with educational institutions – primary schools, secondary schools, and tertiary institutions within our county – as well as religious institutions and private establishments in scaling up our tree planting program. Our desire is to have every citizen in the county plant and take care of at least one tree (including fruit trees) per year.

Honorable members

Nyeri County has been favorably ranked nationally in terms of selected core health indicators such as immunization coverage, deliveries under skilled healthcare workers, HIV prevalence and maternal mortality. However, patient experience within the county health facilities remains sub-optimal. In terms of disease burden, upper respiratory infections top the list of causes of morbidity for most outpatients, while non communicable conditions such as cancers, hypertension, diabetes and heart disease account for the majority of the inpatient cases.

The state of our health sector is wanting. We continue to witness cases of in-patients sharing beds in some wards at our County Referral Hospital and Level 4 hospitals; distribution of essential medicines remains inequitable and punctuated with leakages; only 3 out of our 11 county ambulances are functional; some expensive medical diagnostic equipment is idling at two of our Level 4 hospitals while other equipment has broken down within unreasonably short periods of time. These amongst many other challenges in the health sector have impeded delivery of quality curative services. The consequence has been our citizens incurring catastrophic health expenditures and unnecessary deaths for those who cannot afford.

A cursory review of the most recent County Health Accounts reveal that 43.9% of the Total Health Expenditure in the county was paid for by households, while 34.5%, 15.2% and 6.4% was paid by the county government, corporations and development partners respectively. Interestingly, the county government's budgetary allocation to health has averaged at KShs 2.2 Billion annually (39% of the total county budget) with 64% of it, financing personnel emoluments.

My administration commits to work towards reversing these trends through a multi-pronged approach. Our key area of focus will be provision of promotive and preventive health services by empowering our dispensaries and health centers across the county. We plan to scale up capacity of our health centers to offer basic diagnostic services beginning with a standard package for laboratory services. Our goal is to improve access to diagnostic services at Levels 2 and 3 of our county healthcare system.

We shall accelerate the completion of ongoing construction works at various health centres and dispensaries with a view to expanding the services offered. We will also rationalize the deployment of our healthcare workers at all levels to be in conformity with service workload. Further, we plan to enhance supportive supervision to improve on the service offering standards and overall patient experience.

At the curative services level, we will work towards decongesting the county referral hospital. We will strengthen our four level 4 hospitals to offer specialized services and embrace reverse referral approach where consultants domiciled at the county referral hospital attend to specialized clinics at the level 4 hospitals on a more regular basis. I will lobby for additional resource allocation from the national government to put into effective operation the new Othaya Hospital. As you are aware, the national government plans to put up a National Cancer Hospital at Kimathi University. This is a development that we wholesomely embrace. We shall endeavour to position our County Referral Hospital as a satellite teaching and referral center for the Cancer Hospital.

We appreciate that good governance is critical to achieving our desired standards of healthcare. As such, we plan to put into operation hospital boards to enable community participation in the running of our hospitals. We will also explore modalities of increasing the retention of user fees (cost share charges) from the current 50% to over 85% as part of our broad agenda of increasing hospital autonomy and efficiency.

In support of training for our health care workers, we have engaged the Kenya Medical Training College (KMTTC) to allocate resources to setting up a college at Karatina Hospital and expanding courses offered at the newly created KMTTC Othaya. We look forward into a future where majority of our middle level healthcare workers will be trained in our own facilities. My government will also streamline research undertaken at our hospitals in collaboration with the chartered universities in the county in line with our goal of bridging the gap between research and practice across sectors.

Mr Speaker,

Undoubtedly, quality infrastructure development is instrumental in spurring the economic growth of the county. A significant proportion of the county government's development budget (46%) has in the past been dedicated to upgrading earth roads to gravel standards across the county. My journeys throughout the county meeting with citizens reveal that a significant number of these roads were completed to an unacceptable standard of quality with some already worn out or swept away only a few months after they were certified as complete.

My government commits to ensuring that a quality standard for gravel roads is not only established but adhered to, and that our inspection teams take a lead in this process. Further, we intend to economically empower our communities by ensuring that development of county roads will be undertaken by local communities taking advantage of the preference categories outlined under the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities Program. We will be seeking for your support to sensitize the communities that you represent to benefit from this arrangement soon.

The frequency of breakdown of county government owned machinery for roads repair is indeed worrying. My administration plans to overhaul the entire structure of managing county plant machinery and vehicles to deal with this unacceptable downtime and enable effective deployment.

We plan to decentralize the management of roads maintenance machinery to the sub-county level, and put in place an elaborate supervision arrangement that takes into account the input of the public. Where necessary, retraining of plant operators will be undertaken in collaboration with the national government's Kenya Institute of Highway and Buildings Technology (KIHBT).

Our absorption of conditional grants earmarked for maintenance of roads previously managed by the Kenya Roads Board remains poor. We will address this matter immediately to ensure that we utilize the funds for upgrading to bitumen standard, at least all the roads within our urban centres.

We intend to refocus our county lighting efforts to renewable and clean energy. We will be exploring the use of solar power lights through a pilot scheme. Our desire is to see the investment in energy directly benefit our people in boosting their economic production – be it at the markets, production of borehole water, agro processing or training at vocational centers. As part of our accountability promise, we will also undertake energy audit and implement measures to reduce on recurrent power costs that currently stand at over KShs 60 million annually.

Honorable members

My government holds in high esteem, the enterprising spirit of the people of Nyeri, and indeed does appreciate its catalytic effect in spurring the economic growth that we hope for. We will empower those in cottage industries, hawkers, small traders and all other micro enterprises through formulation of business friendly policies and laws. We will make the licensing environment conducive and have no intentions whatsoever of penalizing entrepreneurs. My administration is committed to ensuring that the ongoing market development projects are completed and the facilities put into use without undue delay.

The Enterprise Development Fund is yet to take off despite budgetary provisions of over KShs 60 million being made in the prior two financial years' budgets. We will quickly develop an elaborate framework for putting this Fund into operation working closely with local financial institutions that have the inbuilt capacity to manage lending to small enterprises.

We believe that once we restore confidence in the business environment we will easily reach out to potential investors to set up industries across the county and therefore provide more job opportunities for our young people. I will be establishing Nyeri County Economic and Social Council comprising a team of eminent persons from this county with a view to ensuring that my government has a sounding board of experienced and committed people of high integrity, to consult on matters regarding the development of the county.

Similarly, we will soon establish the County Budget and Economic Forum (CBEF) as set out in the Public Finance Management Act to provide the requisite opportunity for our citizens and other stakeholders to provide input in the budget development and implementation process.

We also plan to repackage our rich historical and cultural heritage to make our county a tourism hub thereby improving economic activities. May I remind you that our rich history as the epicenter of the Mau Mau struggle, our great heroes and heroines across all the sectors, our enviable natural resources and our religious roots are all features to behold. In the near future, we will be engaging our stakeholders on the modalities of leveraging on these opportunities and scale up investments in this area. Definitely, there will be some policy and legislative support required in this area.

Mr Speaker,

Nyeri County has a vibrant cooperative movement with over 140 active cooperative societies that have a membership of over 300,000 and directly employing more than 2,000 staff. The savings mobilized through this movement are in excess of KShs 6 billion. I wish to assure you of my government's commitment to increasing support to this sector so as to secure the resources of our hard working people. We will streamline governance in the cooperative movement by enhancing our supervisory responsibility and audit. We shall endeavour to create a platform for knowledge sharing for cooperatives across the entire sector. We also acknowledge that time is ripe for enhanced cooperation with the national government's regulatory agencies in the sector such as Saccos Societies Regulatory Authority (SASRA).

Honorable members

Our constitutional mandate in the education sector focuses on pre-primary education and vocational training. Sadly, these areas were not prioritized by the previous government. We will immediately, be recruiting caregivers to support all our public Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) centres as well as beefing up our capacity to assure quality and standards.

Additionally, we will revive our youth polytechnics, recruit additional instructors for the polytechnics and undertake curriculum review to ensure that the courses offered in these centres are market oriented and responsive to the local development needs and changing demographics of the county. My government will continue to support the very needy cases, especially those enrolled in our vocational training centres, by financing their education.

Our county boasts of having two chartered universities, premier colleges offering training at different levels including the largest police college in the country. However, our collaboration with these institutions towards supporting social and economic development remains low. We will be engaging these institutions so as to establish modalities of harnessing our collaboration through structured apprenticeship, research and innovation. Already, we see great potential for collaboration in advancing the youth and sports agenda, fish farming, cottage industries and Information Communication and Technology (ICT) through business process outsourcing.

Honorable members

An estimated 35% of the county's population is between the ages of 15 and 34 years. This youthful population has great potential for contributing to our county's transformation. My government will deeply engage the youth in determining our priority investment areas and also delivering on our promises. One focus area for youth empowerment will be through engagement of youth groups to undertake contracts under the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities agenda.

We will be deliberate in our efforts to make sure that these groups do genuinely take up these opportunities themselves and not as proxies for other demographic categories. Of course, we will extend support to women and special groups such as people living with disabilities.

My government is also committed to reviving the sporting culture of our beloved county. We have many sports legends – amongst them Catherine Ndereba, Douglas Wakiihuri, Margaret Nyairera, Boniface Mucheru, Charles Kamathi, Lucy Kabuu – who we must tap from to mentor upcoming ones.

With regard to competitive sports, we will establish a sports mentorship program, rehabilitate our playgrounds across the county, establish a county tournament covering both athletics and ball games and revive the Nyeri Half Marathon. Simultaneously, we will roll out a program for promoting recreational sports anchored on inter-sectoral collaboration. For instance, we will explore rehabilitation of abandoned quarries; accelerate reforestation of our small hills with exercise trails.

We appreciate the ongoing support by the national government towards renovation of Ruring'u Stadium to international standards and will do our part in ensuring that the facility is not only completed soonest but also that our people make use of it.

Honorable members

The development of the Nyeri County Spatial Plan as expected under the County Government Act, 2012 is long overdue. My government plans to put it as a priority so as to guide other critical physical planning processes including the development of the County Valuation Roll for Land Rates for all the urban areas in the county. We will dedicate resources beginning with the FY 2017/2018 budget towards the formulation of the valuation roll for Nyeri Town with a view to harmonizing the rates charged and also increasing our local revenue.

We acknowledge the national government's support towards regularization of titles for squatters living in colonial villages across the county. My government is committed to seeing this process through as well as investing more resources towards the physical planning of the town centres located in the colonial villages. This initiative will accord security of tenure for the owners of commercial properties at those town centres.

The county government housing estates potential remains largely untapped. We plan to formulate a county housing policy to guide the management and utilization of county housing estates. In doing so, we will be guided by our overall commitment towards provision of adequate and affordable housing in line with Vision 2030.

We envisage a future in which the county will have modern estates in which space is optimally utilized with more residents accessing housing. Alongside all these initiatives, we plan to progressively digitize the county land and housing records, in cooperation with the national government, with the ultimate goal of enabling citizens to access land registry services online.

Mr Speaker

One of the key responsibilities of any government is to safeguard the lives and properties of its people. My government is also committed to honoring this obligation. The most common disaster in our county is fire outbreak. Fire fighting and disaster management is one of the devolved functions and is therefore one of our responsibilities. Our capacity in this area is wanting and my government will take immediate steps to address this concern. We have allocated funds to acquire four additional modern fire engines, to build our capacity to respond on a timely basis to fire disasters. We plan to decentralize this service to the sub-county level. We shall also seek collaboration with other stakeholders like the Kenya Red Cross Society in boosting our capacity in disaster preparedness and response.

Honorable members

Let me touch briefly on a number of cross cutting themes. The people of Nyeri have a new surge of optimism that their county government will deal decisively with theft of public resources. From the outset, we plan to work closely with other national government institutions that are mandated to deal with accountability – especially the Office of the Auditor General and the Ethics and Anti Corruption Commission (EACC)- so as to ensure that we put in place appropriate preventive mechanisms.

We will soon commence the implementation of the recommendations from a Corruption Risks Assessment Survey undertaken by the EACC in 2015/2016. We will be bold in enforcing our code of ethics and will do so working closely with our County Public Service Board that is responsible for entrenching values and principles in our county public service. We seek to ensure that the people who elected us obtain value for money from their government. We will soon carry out a financial, human resource, legal and governance audit with a view to ensuring that amongst others, only authentic outstanding liabilities are paid, our valued staff are properly deployed and that our governance organs are playing their rightful role. Additionally, we will be setting up the County Government Internal Audit Committee to strengthen our risk management and compliance agenda.

We can only be truly accountable, if we continuously engage with the people who elected us. We plan to fully implement our County Public Participation Act and very soon will be setting up Public Participation and Civic Education units with full time staff. In line with our decentralization agenda, we plan to hire village administrators to strengthen our engagement with the communities further down to the village level.

Close collaboration with national government ministries departments, and agencies is another great contributor to our economic development. My government has already taken this desirable path and so far engaged the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, Kenya Medical Training College, the National Treasury in the short time I have been in office with reasonable successes. We will enhance the relationships at the county level through the establishment of the County Intergovernmental Forum. I also plan to aggressively push for similar collaboration with other county governments through the Council of Governors and its attendant committees.

Honorable members

With local revenue collection potential of over KShs 1 billion, our past and current performance is still below par. Revenue leakages still haunt us at all levels of the county. We will roll out a comprehensive plan to seal these loopholes while at the same time accelerate our adoption of automation to improve on revenue collection efficiency for all our major revenue streams. Similarly, we will enhance our use of technology in supporting public engagement and internal communication.

Already we have committed to providing all necessary facilitation to institutions laying out optic fibre through the county. This opportunity will enhance connectivity and also enable thousands of our youths access online jobs.

Honorable members

Many of the proposals that I have articulated will require policy and legislative framework. We shall be forwarding to you a number of legislative and policy proposals for deliberation and approval. We envisage that these proposals will cut across all areas where we have service delivery mandate – Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Development, Technical and Vocational Training, Pre Primary Education, Trade and Markets, Tourism Development, Delineation of Villages, Disaster Management, Sports, Finance amongst others.

Additionally, we will be initiating review of various existing county legislations to accord to our changing needs and alignment to our manifesto.

Over the next few days, I will be forwarding for your consideration and approval, the names of my proposed nominees for various leadership positions in the County Government including County Executive Committee Members, County Secretary, Chief Officers of County Departments and the Chairperson of the County Public Service Board.

I count on your utmost support and cooperation in our mutual endeavour to deliver the best services possible to the people of Nyeri.

May God Bless Kenya

May God Bless Nyeri County