

**Citation for Mr. Simon Nyutu Gicharu, CBS
for the award of Honorary Doctor of Science
by Gulu University on October 25, 2014**

EARLY LIFE: - Foundation Years

Mr. Simon Nyutu Gicharu was born in a small rural village known as Gathiruini in Kiambu County, Kenya, in 1964. He is the first in a family of six, born to the late Stephen Gicharu, and Alice Wambui. His early life experiences were the cauldron in which his successful characteristic traits were shaped. As a pupil at Kiawairia Primary School and later Gathiruini Secondary School, Mr. Gicharu had to walk many kilometres to and from school. His parents were peasant farmers and their small piece of land, which they tilled for subsistence, provided barely enough for their upkeep. To supplement the domestic income, Mr. Gicharu, alongside his siblings, picked coffee at large commercial farms for which he was paid by every single kilogram of coffee berries picked.

Mr. Gicharu was a diligent student and he joined Murang'a High School for his O-Levels (now one of the top 10 national schools) in Kenya. He was the captain / headboy in his final year. While in school, he etched a reputation for entrepreneurial acumen, and for

assisting fellow students in Mathematics, a subject he was very good at.

Mr Gicharu obtained a Bachelor of Education Science (Honours) degree from Kenyatta University in 1990. His majors were Mathematics and Chemistry. Soon after graduation, he continued to exercise his passion for education, teaching his favourite Maths subject at various secondary schools in Kenya, and later at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, and at the Thika Technical Training Institute. It was at this time when he authored Kenya's first post-secondary school book on Mathematics, "*Applied Mathematics for Crafts Engineering.*"

Mr. Gicharu married his sweetheart Jane Gathoni Nyutu and they were blessed with three children; two boys and one daughter.

SELF INITIATIVE: -Entrepreneurship

In 1993, barely three years after graduation, Mr. Gicharu planted the germ seed that would sprout into a life-long dedication of assisting young people. With only Ksh20,000 (US\$220) he established the Kenya Entrepreneurship Promotion Programme, a non-governmental organization that provided micro-loans and training in entrepreneurship.

Spurred by his initiative, the British Council accorded him a scholarship to study entrepreneurship at Cranfield University in Britain in 1995.

Going to Britain meant he had to leave his teaching job at Thika Technical Training Institute. But it also opened him to the realities of the suffering that most African students endured while pursuing higher education abroad. Upon his return to Kenya, six months later, he resolved to do something that would stop African students from this suffering. But he had no job, no means of income, and yet had a young family to support.

This did not deter him and the Kenya Entrepreneurship Promotion Programme he had started earlier slowly developed into a small college operating from the backstreets of Thika town. The college started by offering computer classes and later diversified into Management courses, under a new name Thika School of Management Studies.

Gradually, Thika School of Management Studies increased its student enrolment and the number of courses. The types of courses it offered were determined by the job demands of the day and with the explosion in use of information science and technology, the Thika School of Management Studies changed its name to Thika Institute of Technology in 2003.

That same year, Mr. Gicharu, resolved that Science training would be the backbone of Thika Institute of Technology. He made a trip to

India, on scanty information that at Punjab State, they were assembling science equipment in cottage industries that was relatively affordable for institutions. Mr. Gicharu immediately purchased the equipment, paving way for Thika Institute of Technology to become the first private college in post-independence Kenya to be accredited to offer the Diploma programme in Pharmacy.

Thika Institute of Technology also diversified its curriculum and started offering science degree programmes in partnership with Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology.

In 2008, the Institute was awarded a Letter of Interim Authority by the Commission of Higher Education in Kenya to operate as an independent university under the name Mount Kenya University.

Commitment to Providing Quality Education and Science Programmes

With the establishment of Mount Kenya University, Mr. Gicharu inched closer to attaining his vision of assisting young people achieve their academic dreams. The university's commitment in supporting science training was driven by the realization that most of Africa's socio-economic problems can only be solved through science. Driven by the incessant passion to improve access to education, provide infrastructure and a diversified curriculum, the university was

granted a full Charter status in 2011. At the tender age of 46 years, Mr. Gicharu became the youngest Kenyan to have established a Chartered university. The US\$220 Kenya Entrepreneurship Promotion Programme has now become US\$400 million Mount Kenya University, with 14 Campuses in Kenya, one in Rwanda and another in Somaliland. It employs over 3,000 people and has a student population of about 50,000.

Throughout his life at the helm of Mount Kenya University, Mr. Gicharu has distinguished himself for his humility. Mr. Gicharu has often concentrated on supporting the growth of Mount Kenya University with passion. Professionalism and merit are the single most determinant factors in recruitment, promotions and decision making at Mount Kenya University.

The outcome of this wisdom is seen in the series of the “firsts” that define Mount Kenya University. The University was the first private institution of higher learning in Kenya to break the threshold of 17,000 students; it was the first private university in Kenya to offer degree programmes in Pharmacy; it was the first University to establish a Campus in the remote Turkana County in the Northern frontier of Kenya; it was the first Kenyan University to establish a Campus in Kigali, Rwanda and Hargeisa, Somaliland. It was also the first private university in Kenya to build an anatomy laboratory at a public hospital, the Thika Level 5 Hospital . In 2009, Mr. Gicharu and Prof. Stanley Waudu, the Vice-Chancellor, both acting on behalf of Mount Kenya University, signed a Memorandum of Understanding

with Gulu University to boost science training. One of the outcomes of this MoU was the establishment and consequent accreditation of the Mount Kenya University School of Medicine. The School admitted its first batch of students in September, 2014. With the recent accreditation of the Nutrition and Dietetics programme by the Kenya Nutritionists and Dieticians Institute, Mount Kenya University now has the highest number of accredited Science programmes among private universities in Kenya.

Mr. Gicharu is a recipient of the 1st Class Chief of the Order of the Burning Spear (CBS), the highest award a civilian can get in Kenya. He was accorded the title in 2013, by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Kenya in recognition of his contribution to the growth of tertiary education in Kenya.

To cap the accolades that define his stellar managerial and leadership skills, Mr. Gicharu was appointed by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Kenya as the Chairman of the Rural Electrification Authority Board of Directors in April, 2014.

Mr. Gicharu is the Chairman of the National Association of Private Universities in Kenya, which advocates for the creation of a conducive environment for the growth of higher education in Kenya. He is a strong believer in philanthropy as evidenced by the fact that in 2012 he established a Chairman's Scholarship Fund at Mount Kenya University, which gives bursaries to bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Mr. Gicharu is the patron of the Mount Kenya University Enterprise Academy, which provides seed capital of up to US\$500,000 to promising entrepreneurs who are alumni of the University. He is also the founder of Equip Africa Institute, a regional-wide executive training arm dedicated to building capacity and expertise among African professionals.

Mr. Gicharu is a recipient of Marketing Society of Kenya's Superlative Trailblazer award (2011) in recognition of being the only individual in Kenya to have started a university from scratch.

In addition to being in the coveted league of Chartered universities, Mount Kenya University was recently admitted to the Association of Commonwealth Universities. It is also a member of the Interuniversity Council of East Africa. The University ranks among the top 10 universities in Kenya in both the *Webometrics* and *4ICU* global rankings.

No doubt Mr. Gicharu continues to inspire, encourage, give hope and shape the future lives of thousands of people. It is not easy to find someone of Mr. Gicharu's stature for this kind of award.

To Mr. Simon Nyutu Gicharu, a successful visionary leader, a courageous entrepreneur, a humble servant and a passionate promoter of higher education in East Africa, we award the **Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science**.

