

Welcome Speech

by

Prof. Dr. Ram KM Shrestha, the Vice-Chancellor of Kathmandu University at the 5th  
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**Honorable Minister of Education and Pro-Chancellor of Kathmandu University,  
Mr. Giriraj Mani Pokharel; distinguished guests and dignitaries, participants,  
organizers and my fellow colleagues from Kathmandu University.**

I congratulate you all for managing to host this historic event in Kathmandu, Nepal. What impressed me was the spectrum of organizations involved in this feat. At the outset, on behalf of Kathmandu University, I would like to applaud you all for this effort. We look forward to organizing more of these events in coming days.

Let me first tell you a small personal story. After spending about 15 years in my education in Europe, I returned to Nepal in 1996 to establish a hospital in Dhulikhel, which was then a small town where people hardly saw any prospects of prosperity. The hospital chose a bold vision of 'Quality health service to the poor' and committed that no person would be denied the services, including those who couldn't pay anything. In the ensuing days, the hospital that had a modest beginning became one of the fastest growing health institutions in the country. Besides the immense support from the local community, government and other stakeholders in Nepal, this could happen only because we were able to gain financial support from well-wishers around the world. This included the money saved by school-going students from their lunch, from the youths who saved by having one less bottle of beer, from the families that asked for donation to support us than for the flowers in the funeral of their loved ones, from the friends that asked for support rather than the gifts for their birthdays, marriages or anniversaries.

While I bowed to the love and support from people from various walks of life, one thing that constantly bothered me, every single day was, why in a country so blessed with nature, perhaps like no other country in the world, I still needed to beg money for a sacred mission to save lives of the people? Why a country, which is supposed to have one of the highest potentials of hydropower, still has villages where kids need to do their homeworks under the light of a candle? Why in a country, which has almost 365 days of sun, we still need to shiver in cold at our rooms during winter? Why in a country with abundance of opportunities, every single day hundreds of youths leave their families to toil in the distant deserts, thousands of miles apart from their loved ones? Why in a country like ours should I spend sleepless nights thinking where I would find funds to construct the next building of my institution, to buy the next equipment, to create next scholarships for students? Why should I constantly run around organizations, foundations and other donors to help accomplish some of our simple noble dreams? Why? I still ask these questions every day and have not got a satisfactory answer. I am optimistic that this august gathering will come up with some answers, in fact, some solutions to my queries.

I shall not attempt to explain much about renewable energy because that would be futile in front of this crowd of experts from around the world. I will just share some of my personal thoughts on why and how we can move ahead in harnessing the gifts of nature for the benefits of mankind and the nature itself.

**First and foremost**, renewable energy is not just a choice, need or a fashion in the current context, but it is rather a moral imperative of our generation. As the environment deteriorates in an unprecedented pace around the world, the responsibility to halt this trend and restore nature in its own form lies on the shoulders of all of us. **Second**, renewable energy in the context of Nepal, is also perhaps the only savior to lift us all from the vicious trap of poverty and dependency. And the **third**, renewable energy might be the most important force to unleash the wave of development opportunities by fostering innovation and technological growth.

Yes, there are several challenges to fulfill these seemingly straightforward and easy ideas. However, nothing is insurmountable. While there is still significant room for improving the policy environment and creating a conducive situation for advancing renewable energy, a lot can still be done within the current context as well.

**First**, we need to break the boundaries between the academia, public sector and private sector. Gone are the days when each of these sectors would compete against the other and consider themselves as rivals. The latest technological growth, especially from other Asian countries, have shown that coordination and collaboration between these three sectors is the foundational stone for development. I know, this is not an easy task because each of us needs to get out of our comfort zones. We need to be proactive and reach out to other potential partners. George Bernard Shaw once said, **‘The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can’t find them, make them.’** Yes, this is the time to make the circumstances we want. Our languages, interests and perspectives might be different. However, our goal is the same. It is to ultimately make the lives of people better.

**Second**, we need to engage more with the local communities and other potential stakeholders. Somebody said, **‘Eyes don’t see what the mind doesn’t know.’** We have to do a lot in terms of educating the communities and potential stakeholders about the opportunities that lie in front of them. It is by making them understand the value of the resources they have, we ignite the fire of enthusiasm. If the villagers completely understand that the water that flows in front of their backyard holds the key to their prosperity, they will leave no stones unturned to organize, invest and unlock the treasure. If the local policy makers, investors and users see the alternative future hidden behind the local resources around them, they will become our strongest allies.

There is gold in our water, wind and sun. Delaying its usage doesn’t store it for future. What we lose today, we just lose it forever. Let us communicate this to all. Every single day of delay is nothing but a loss to all. Let us care more about who will benefit with our efforts than worry about who will own it. Let us not just think what we will gain with an endeavor, but also focus on what we are losing by not going for it. I would like to urge all

-- the academia, private sector, public sector, government, donors and other national and international stakeholders -- to have new lens to the opportunities that lie on our table. Our future generation will not blame us for the things that we attempted and failed. They will feel shame for the things that we never attempted despite having a chance.

And finally, the **third**, let us invest more in the education and research in these areas. I would like to emphasize that multidisciplinary collaboration is a must for success in this field. Let us come out of the box of our own technical expertise. Professionals from every single field have a role to play. Concurrently, let us create wet laboratories for the scholars and researchers from Nepal and abroad. I would rather see a student wet in water, drenched in rain and soaked in the sweat under the sun than in a comfortable, cozy chair inside a library or an office. Let us take our classrooms from the campus to the community. This is how we will prepare the next generation of leaders through education. Nepal is, as we all know, an ideal laboratory for renewable energy technology due to its unparalleled geo-climatic diversity. Let us utilize our collective strengths to harness the potential of this unique scenario. While these efforts transform the pedagogical approaches, they also change the lives of people in the communities and change the face and future of the world.

Dear friends and dignitaries, Nepal is ushering into a new era of development and governance. We see opportunities everywhere. The hearts and minds of the people are filled with zeal, optimism and hope. Let us get ready to move ahead in this new climate of optimism.

The most important renewable energy is our mind and spirit. The more we use it, the more we renew it. I hope you all will agree to it.

Thank you and best wishes.