CONVOCATION SPEECH BY

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Beyond the Degree: Knowledge, Relationships and Purpose

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Good morning! First, congratulations. You have worked hard for this moment. There have been lectures, practical work, field assignments, examinations, research, deadlines, and probably quite a few sleepless nights. Today, you can finally pause, look back, and say, **"I did it."** Today is a day for celebration. But it is also the beginning of a new responsibility. In a way, society is saying to you: **"You have gained knowledge. We now trust you to use it wisely."** Looking back on my own professional journey, I have had the opportunity to work with researchers, government institutions, development partners, field officers, communities, farmers, and many others including Presidents of Countries, Ambassadors and professionals. A few lessons stayed with me throughout that journey, that I wish to share with our permission.

Technical knowledge is essential, but technical knowledge alone is rarely enough to create lasting change. It is also called "T" learning – you have your main subject to anchor, but you are expanding your "T" every day by acquiring knowledge and experience. Your degree has given you a strong technical foundation. You should be proud of it. But the real world does not divide its problems neatly into university subjects. When you examine the challenges and issues closely, you may discover that it is also about technical subjects like water, climate, markets, finance, technology, infrastructure, policy, or all about human behaviour.

Technology and management aspects are valuable simply because it is modern or sophisticated and helps to solve real problems, provided we understand the context of the challenge, can afford it, and when it continues working after the experts have gone home. Over the years, I have learned not to ask only: "Is this technically correct?" I have learned to ask: "Is it practical? Is it fair? Can people use it? Can they maintain it? Will they trust it? Will it create lasting value?" That is the challenge I would like to place before you today. Use the technical and management knowledge you have gained, but combine it with five other strengths: **sustainability, digital intelligence, communication, teamwork, and professional networks.**

Let me begin with sustainability. Sustainability should not be a paragraph added at the end of a report. It should be one of the first things we think about. Whenever we introduce a technology, design a project, increase production, or manage a natural resource, we should ask ourselves some simple questions. Will this solution continue to work in ten or twenty years? Will it protect our soil, water, energy, and biodiversity? Will it strengthen people's livelihoods? Who will benefit from it? Who might be left behind? Ultimately, are we solving today's problem by creating another problem for tomorrow? A good example is food security, industrial growth and climate change. We gain from one side and we lost a lot. **It is about creating greater value with less waste, less harm, and greater fairness.**

The second strength is digital intelligence. You are entering a professional life at an exciting time. We now have mobile applications, sensors, satellites, drones, digital maps, data analytics, automation, and artificial intelligence. These tools can help us understand real life situations better. For example, crops, weather, water, soil, markets, and many other things. They can improve decisions and reduce the risk to business and provide better benefits to the society while protecting public goods for future generations. However, we still need to ask: Does it solve a genuine problem? Is the information reliable? Use artificial intelligence, but do not hand over your judgement to it. Use data but remember that behind every data point there may be a farmer, a family, an ecosystem, a business, or a community. Some of the technologies you will use five years from now may not yet exist. So, the most important digital skill you can develop is not simply mastering one tool. It is learning how to keep learning. As I said, extending the T, that we spoke of. **The future will belong not only to those who know the most today, but also to those who remain curious and willing to learn tomorrow.**

The third strength is communication. This is something I have come to appreciate deeply in my own career. You may have an excellent idea. Your research or point may be sound. Your technical solution may be completely correct. But if you cannot explain it clearly, it may never be understood, supported, funded, or implemented. Communication does not begin with speaking. It begins with listening. When we enter a community, meet farmers, or work with an institution, we may feel that, as technical professionals, we should provide the answers. But sometimes our first responsibility is not to speak. It is to ask the right questions and listen carefully. People working directly with the land, water, technology, or local institutions possess valuable knowledge, that we call traditional knowledge of institutional memory. That knowledge may not appear in a textbook, but it is still important. Hence, listening does not weaken your authority as a professional. It improves the quality of your decisions. People may not remember every technical detail you present. But they will remember whether you listened to them, whether you respected them, and whether they could trust you. **Knowledge becomes valuable when it can be understood. It becomes influential when it inspires action.**

The fourth strength is teamwork especially in management. Nearly every meaningful achievement in my own career has depended on a team. No one person, regardless of qualifications or experience, can solve challenges such as food insecurity, climate change, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, or technological transformation alone. A scientist may focus on evidence. A farmer may focus on what is practical. An investor may focus on risk. A government official may focus on policy and accountability. A community may focus on fairness, access, and local needs. These different perspectives are not obstacles. If we manage them well, they can lead to better solutions. Teamwork does not mean that everyone agrees all the time. It means that there is enough trust to disagree respectfully and still move forward together. Therefore, give credit to others. Accept responsibility when something goes wrong. Ask questions when you do not know. Lead when leadership is required. But also, be willing to support someone else when they are better placed to lead. **Your qualifications may bring you into the room. Your ability to listen, communicate, and build trust will determine what happens inside that room.**

The fifth strength is networking, both locally and globally. Networking is about building genuine relationships based on trust, contribution, and mutual respect. Start with the network around you today. Look at the people sitting beside you. One may become a researcher. Another may become an entrepreneur, an engineer, a government official, an academic, or an industry leader. One day, you may meet again while facing a problem that neither of you can solve alone. So, please do not let these university relationships disappear after today. Stay connected with your classmates and lecturers. Join professional communities. Participate in conferences and online forums. Explore research partnerships and international programmes. Learn from people working in different countries and cultures. Do not enter a network asking only: "What can I receive?" Also ask: "What knowledge, encouragement, connection, or opportunity can I contribute?" **Be locally grounded and globally connected.**

Dear graduates, as you begin the next chapter of your lives, I invite you to become **translators**. Translate science into solutions, data into decisions, and technical ideas into language people can understand. Become **connectors**. Connect subjects, research with practice, institutions with communities, and local experience with global knowledge. Become **collaborators**. Bring people together across professions, generations, cultures, and countries. And become **custodians**. Use your education not only to advance your own career, but also to protect all our futures depend. So, master your profession, but remain curious. Use technology but retain your judgement. Communicate confidently but listen carefully. Congratulations to every one of you. **Thank you!**

Ananda Mallawatantri, October 14 2026.