

Kennedy Odede - Inclusive Cities

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: By 2050, 68 percent of the world's population will be living in urban areas, and the number of slum dwellers will increase to 3 billion.

This rapid pace of urbanisation threatens to put pressure on existing infrastructure, which exacerbates existing inequalities and, in turn, leads to the formation of slums.

ARCHIVAL RECORDING: Thank you so much, Zoe. And I'm very happy to be here today. So we talk about inclusive cities. I'm going to tell you something quickly. I'm a product of that window that I think. So my family came from rural area in Kenya. Climate change, drought. They were looking for better opportunities. Where'd you go to? You go to a city, Nairobi.

They came to the city thinking that the city was inclusive. They were wrong. They ended up in the slums called Kibera.

Back to the interview with Kennedy Odede:

TARIQ AL OLAIMY narration: I'm Tariq Al Olaimy, and this is "People and Planet", a podcast from Expo 2020 Dubai's Programme for People and Planet, where changemakers from all over the world breakdown what it will take to create a sustainable future for our planet.

[INTRO STING]

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: My guest today is Kennedy Odede, one of Africa's best-known community organizers and social entrepreneurs. Kennedy grew up in Kenya's Kibera slum, where he experienced first hand the devastating realities of life in extreme poverty. His experience led him to launch Shining Hope for Communities, or SHOFCO, an organization that impacts over 2.4 million slum dwellers across 17 urban slums in Kenya.

ARCHIVAL RECORDING: Look around the world. What is happening? The greedy cities... I say city as a human being, they just take, take, take. Where you see crime rate, you see violence, because they have to survive. So I hope we're able to create a city that is inclusive, a city that is innovative, a city that knows who fits it. So, that's my story.

Back to the interview with Kennedy Odede:

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: As one of the hosts of the "Inclusive Cities: Last Mile Delivery in Slums and Informal Settlements", which was held as part of Expo 2020 Dubai, we got a chance to speak to Kennedy on why it was important to draw the world's attention to inclusive solutions for building safe, resilient and sustainable settlements.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: Alright, great. So Kennedy let's get started. Um, you're a community builder. You're a lifelong learner. You're a social entrepreneur and you're someone whose entire life is an answer to the question: What does my community need? Um, so please Kennedy, can you start by just introducing yourself and what's your life mission?

KENNEDY ODEDE: Thank you so much. So my name is Kennedy Odede and I come from Kibera slum, which is one of the largest slums in Africa.

Yea so when I was born, I thought the world was simple, you know. You look around you and you think that's your world. And there was a lot of poverty around. And then I remember when I moved from Kibera I was wealth, and I am like, "What? What is happening?" So coming from a very, very poor family, it was a very challenging life, with the life of hopelessness. And you are feeling that you are, you have no purpose. And that was that good for you as a young man, you became angry. And you end up doing things that are not good because you are hopeless. And honestly, I lost a lot of my friends who, uh, some of them were killed by the police. Some of them committed suicide. And it's because they have no hope.

My parents came from, uh, from a rural area in Kenya, in a Western part of Kenya, blindfolded by the idea of the lights of the city. So they thought it was a beautiful place. They'll come get a job. And then you end up without a job. And to make the story short, after going through that, I really found my hope, the idea that what is life about? I want to use my life to make other people's life better, not to go through what I went through.

So I got a job in a factory and I started a movement of idea of bringing people together with this idea that, those who are living that life are the ones who can change their life. So that's how SHOFECO started. You can tell the name SHOFECO comes from Shining Hope for Communities, you know? And I was able to convince women, youth, that is your movement. And we didn't, I didn't know how to even speak English well, not at all. I didn't even know how to write proposal, but in my belly, I have that idea, that we can bring change.

And my mother used to tell me, “Kennedy, whoever wears the shoes knows where it pinches.” So I told my community that, you know, we live here, we know the challenges and we can, we can lead our transformation.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: Thank you so much Kennedy. Um, you know, what was it like for you back then growing up, you know? Paint us a picture of the environment you grew up in, the sights, the sounds, the feelings. What was your home like growing up?

KENNEDY ODEDE: Yea. So, so life in Kibera slum is bittersweet. I have to say that. You can't only see one, one side. At the same time, it is a vibrant community. And I remember how we were taken care of by other people in the community, other women, you know, they're all our mothers. Men, they're all our fathers.

And as a kid, Kibera was not that congested. I remember seeing cows coming, passing by Kibera, you know what I mean, as a kid, following them to the dump. Whereby now it's a sewage, you know what I mean. It was a flowing water, you see. There was a sound of the train when it comes, you know, the train, bringing people from the factory. You know, we used to live in a 10 by 10, all of us there. And most of the time we spent the time with no food, honestly. So I understand, I understand that feeling of not having something to eat. And I remember as a, as a, as a kid going to the garbage to see what people have thrown away. So everyone is poor in the community, but there are some who can afford food and there are some who couldn't get it.

And I remember my mother, uh, she's very powerful in my life because she's a woman of pride. So we used to have the cooking oil, and she would say, “Kennedy, you are looking so, so hungry. Can you go to the room, to the house there, to put

the oil in your mouth to look that you've eaten." You know what I mean? And that was pride, man, you know, and we did, we did that.

So it was a really tough, tough, tough life, you know, and, uh, living in a, in a community whereby there's no toilet, you know. I hated that so much. And I remember in the morning you have to wake up very early to use that one pit, pit, pit latrine.

And the other thing that makes me sad is that people didn't understand our problems. They were all coming with their solution. Nobody wanted to listen, and it really pained me so much that poverty makes you feel like, uh, it is you, uh, it is your mistake.

It's not your fault, it wasn't my fault to grow up in Kibera, you know, in this poor family, you know, that had no hope. You see.

So for me, that was the, the life. You go to the butcher, you see the meat hung there or the, or the, or they're roasting something called Mutura and meat, but you can't afford. And that also was challenging. And I think at the same time it taught me what is called the self-control. You're hungry, you can see it Kennedy but you can't take it.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: And, and how do you carry all of those complex feelings? Cause you're talking about being hungry for nutrition, hungry for change. You're grieving your friends. You're, uh, navigating, you know, all these very complex emotions that are very young age, you know. How supported did you feel and going through that journey, um, and also as you reflect back now as an adult on those feelings?

KENNEDY ODEDE: Everything I went through really built me and defined who I am. I was a hopeless person, I gave up, you know. I also lived on the street, so I'm a street man, you know. And I remember not scared of death because what do you wanna live for? What do you wanna live for? Your life is useless.

MUSIC

You're feeling you're nothing. And you are like a refugee in your own country. Your friends are being killed and you're being arrested for nothing, and nobody.

But there was an opening. In my giving up in life, I really loved the story of America, United States, and the story of the struggle of the people of color. And then that really was Amazing for me, because I was looking for something to look at. And then I came across this man called Martin Luther King Jr, and fighting for the rights of the community. And I'm like, wow, they cannot go to this restaurant because they are black, you know.

So Michael King Jr really became my role model. And, uh, and I fall into readings, and by reading about his stories, that idea of dreaming... and then what was powerful, he was using his life for others. It was not about him, and that really moved me a lot. So I said, you know what? Okay.

So the Martin Luther King story really amazed me, and the idea for him to use the church. Okay let's be honest, what people don't about Dr. King, that [he] was a, was a preacher, somewhere in the south. And then from that small church, the fire was burning, you know what I mean, and it was preaching things and he became bigger than the church. You see? And the church in the state by then for African American was a place that they felt accepted.

So I thought, think about it Kennedy. I want to do something like Dr. King. I want to be a small Dr. King in this Kibera, you know. I say I can't be a preacher, I know for sure. What is another thing that my community love? Guess what? We love football, or they call it soccer.

MUSIC

So when I got my job in the factory around 15 years old, I bought a soccer ball. I think it was 20 cents. And that soccer ball became our church. We could play this soccer ball and then talk about our issues. Believe me, SHOFCO was born out of that.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: Beautiful, that's incredible. What, what first connected you to Dr. King? Was there a moment, uh, that came across your path that, um, Dr. King really became very prevalent in his, in his dreams connected to your dreams?

KENNEDY ODEDE: You know, when I was growing up in poverty, I won't lie to you, we used to complain a lot. We complain that we don't like that. Nobody cared about us, you know. And Dr. King was about action, you know what I mean? And then his idea of the dream, I have a dream, you know. I also had a dream of Kibera, you know what I mean? We can have a small foundation here that one day will have impact. So right now, as I speak to you, SHOFCO has an office in New York, you know what I mean. And for me, that was amazing. You know, when you sort of have a movement in the slum by the people themselves who understand the struggle, and then use that as a transformation.

So, so, so I think I really got that hope and I feel like, uh, for you to, to have change in people's life, you must change yourself. And I think that was the thing I did, you

know. I was, I was bad. I was a lost soul. You know what I mean? And I say, I will not touch anybody's life until I change myself. So I honestly worked on myself.

And setting up SHOFCO is not just 20 cents. No, that'd be a lie. I was struggling looking for light. Looking for something to do. And then you realize something my brother, is that, what is life? And how much money you have, if you don't have impact in someone's life? Why do you live, you know? What is the purpose of humanity? So for me that was so much powerful. And I said to myself, God, I want to use my life. And up to now I'm not regretting, that the life I get and the connection and the opportunity, I will use it to make people's lives better .

How can we be like a candle? You light other candles. And I think honestly, for me, that's how we live after death, you know what I mean? Maybe I'm crazy, you know.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: And you are answering that question that God is asking you, what are you doing with your life, and it's, and it's really serving that light. Thank you so much for being that embodiment. And I'm really inspired by, you know, when you talked about, uh, football, uh, being that starting point, uh, I also know mangoes are a very important part of your story as well. And you talked about the incredible achievements that SHOFCO has really been able to serve in the community. Maybe paint us that picture: how do you go from a story around a mango, a story around a football, to the early days of SHOFCO, of you actually starting up and the activities that you used to conduct?

KENNEDY ODEDE: You know when I stole that mango in the market, and they beat me almost to death, and I was only hungry, you know what I mean? And nobody wanted to know why I stole the mango. I was just being judged and I was beaten.

So I see this man — I don't know this man — who said, “Why are you beating this child? This a child!” You know, “Stop!” “What do you do?” “He's a thief!” “Stole what?” “Mango.” “How many mangoes?” They can't say. So the guy said, “I'll pay those mangoes.” You know, and this guy paid it and walk with me.

I don't remember him honestly. Even I see him now, I don't know, because I was a kid. I remember asking this man: Who are you? And this man told me that, “I am a Good Samaritan.” Ay, huh? You know that really shocked me, that you don't have to know somebody to do something good to them. So that man saved my life.

And up till now I don't know that man. I swear to you. If I see him I don't know if he's the one, you know, but he left something in me. So what are we learning from this? You never know how many people you are touching their lives with small deeds.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: And there was another Good Samaritan, I believe a priest who gave you that a book, uh, that introduced you to Martin Luther King. Is that correct?

KENNEDY ODEDE: couple of churches there, and I used to go there and just play basketball around there, you know, and eh, that is how I met the priest. And that is also how I got the book, that really kind of also changed my life.

So I don't think there is one thing that changed my life. But as I told you before, I think there are many, many things that were there that were happening, know what I mean. And there was, there was this idea of helplessness, feeling useless, and I think the first thing is to have pride.

And because I didn't have mentors, so I do something crazy as a teenager. So I used to speak to Mandela. I know, I know, maybe I'm crazy. I used to speak to my Martin Luther King Jr. So when somebody looked down on me, I felt so poor, and so I be like, "Marcus Garvey, what could you do?" Know what I mean? And I get that energy of Marcus Garvey talking to me, you know what I mean? And at another moment I talk to Nelson Mandela, you know, and bringing people together. And I feel like I'm talking to him, you know.

And really they became my invisible mentors, you know, in my room alone, you know, I used to live in 10 by 10. I didn't have a mattress. I was using T-lamp, but I loved my silent. But honestly, by finding the love of books, ah, I closed my 10 by 10 room and I just open my book, and I'll be with Mandela, you know, in the struggle with South Africa. And I would be like in that moment. Or I'd be with Dr. King in the US, you know what I mean. And then after that, I also became imagination person. I was just imagining, you know.

I remember that another story I love was Rosa Parks, who also... so much, you know what I mean. The idea was to stand up in the bus, you know what I mean, sitting in the right place. So I said to myself, Kennedy, in this struggle, I also want to stand up, and say that I am not poor Kennedy. Poverty is a mindset. Poverty is a mindset. I'm not poor. I am also standing up and saying no to poverty. I will make it, not for myself, but for my community.

So you can see how it was imagination. And it really, oh God, it really built me.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: And I think it's for that reason that children today are imagining talking to an invisible Kennedy Odede. I can imagine that that's now happening.

You also talked about those defining moments and. There is the greatest drug in the world, which is love. And as the SHOFCO gained recognition, you happen to meet your wife, Jessica. And I, I wonder if you could tell us, uh, maybe your short version of that love story. Tell us, you know, how that happened and actually how that started to also shape the work that you're doing at SHOFCO today.

KENNEDY ODEDE: So you have to know, or... Okay, this was funny, because I was the mayor of Kibera, not elected. Okay. And I used to have one email, because I was also the leader of SHOFCO when SHOFCO was starting. And SHOFCO was more like a government of its own. We had a cabinet, you know I mean. So one day in my inbox (I used to check my inbox once a month) and I got an email from this lady who say, "I heard about SHOFCO, what you're doing. I want to come."

I was like, in my heart, I don't want a white savior. Sorry, I'm being honest. So I write and I say, "Thank you so much, you know. Africa for Africans, you know. We are from the community. You don't understand anything about Kibera. Thank you so much." You know and I was so proud. "Yes, I'm Marcus Garvey," you know. We believe in community by themselves, changing lives!

My friend, Jessica, not easy, did not give up. "Oh Kennedy, yes, I don't believe in white saviorism. I want to come to learn. I've done theater." Because this can, you used to do what is called ambush theater.

So Jessica say, "I am into theater, I've studied. I want to come and I want to work with you and your theatre, and also listen to the community." So, anyway, I took that email, I printed it. That's after, I don't know, two months. She wrote back again, she wasn't giving up on me, on coming.

So I went to her cabinet. It was a beautiful organization, grassroots. And I say to the head of theater, I said, "This is crazy lady, what'd you think?" "Why can't she just come and help us out, you know, so that we can be writing our things, our stuff, if that's what she's good at."

So anyway Jessica came, and that's how we met. And Jessica was doing a good job, but one day Jessica moved to my 10x10 room, with her bag. And I'm like, "what are you doing here? No, no, no. I came here, because I don't feel comfortable working with the community and still going away. You know, I want to be with you at this house, in this shanty room, whatever."

So that's how Jessica and I met. And I remember what happened is that she got sick of malaria. And she was very, very sick. And for me, when you're sick, we don't go to hospitals, you know. And the only hospital I know is called Kenyatta Hospital, which for me as a kid, that place you go, you don't come back.

So I started calling around, where is the hospital for rich people? You know what I mean. I asked my friend right, where do the rich people go when they're sick? And they said Nairobi Hospital, you know, and we organized, we take her there. And she was very, very skinny, I remember well, and I knew she was going to die. So the following day I went to see her, and I'm like Kennedy as an African man, you have to say the truth that you love her, so she dies knowing that you loved her. Okay. So one day I went there, I walked to the hospital and I say, "Jessica, I love you." And I ran back to Kibera because I thought she was gonna die anyway, and I wanted her to know that she died knowing that this guy was hiding the love. You know, that's how I met Jessica and she became part of this movement, yea for a long time, you know. So that's the story of Jessica. And she's amazing.

We have three children now. Twins and one girl, three years old and three years old boy. And, the last one, 21 months.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: God bless you. And what you said as well. In that, in that experience of, I mean even a hospital visit, um, as something in which, uh, in those deep inequalities, um, can be a potential death sentence. And, you know, the work that you're doing at SHOFCO particularly over the pandemic, uh, has really been to help counter some of those inequalities that exist in the slum communities. And I wonder whether you can tell us a little bit more about, you know, in this time of the pandemic, what steps have you taken at SHOFCO to protect the community, and to really work to alleviate some of those inequalities that existed around health care.

KENNEDY ODEDE: COVID really exposed the reality of the inequality that exists. And really it makes me so sad that the world really don't care about poor people, they say but really no.

What is the issue? Stay in your room, wash your hand with clean water, stay away from people. And 50% of the world or 60% are people who are struggling. So, you telling me you live in a Kibera slum, whereby infection is very high. You live in a 10 by 10 room. You have no fridge, are you really making policies for the poor?

The government asked me to join a COVID taskforce, and to lead the community, uh, community initiatives. And, you know, and that's when we're able to say that we have to change the package of how we talk about this COVID.

For example, I remember one of the woman I met in Kibera and she was not wearing a mask. She doesn't care. I'm like, "Where's your mask?" She said, "Kennedy

(masks were going for a dollar by then), should I choose to buy food for my children or to wear a mask? I better die from COVID than to die from hunger.” And that really hit me so hard.

So what we did was... these people are living from hand to mouth. So, we were able to look for partners and send money to the most vulnerable on their phone.

So they can buy what they want, to buy food. And then we set up hand-washing station, you know, in the main entrance of the communities. And honestly, we did that in over 15 slums in Kenya. And it's powerful, and we use the community leaders to be the one talking about COVID.

COVID really came from, you know, those were — they were right — those who were able to travel around the world. Eh, and those who are now living under \$2 a day have now to deal with it, and there was no plan. Know what I mean. Yea, I'm very happy. We were able to help some, we served over 2.5 million people who are really able to wash their hands, able to feed and just to pass information around.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: And so many of these topics you spoke about on the panel at Expo 2020 is, uh, Inclusive Cities events. You also moderated many of those panels. And I'm wondering, listening to a lot of the discussions that have happened so far at Expo 2020, what do you think of Expo's mission to convene these kinds of leaders, experts, grassroots communities around transforming the way that we inclusively build, move, and live in habitats of the future?

KENNEDY ODEDE: Honestly, what really happened that I really loved about the Expo 2020 Dubai. First of all, for me it is a powerful thing, because you think about expo, you think of countries, I mean, or big companies, you know. But today they

talk about the people and the planet. That for me was, wow! [00:32:17] And what is powerful about it If you ask me, is this idea of, they were not the same people in the room. We have architects, city planners. And we have musicians, and we have community organizers, you know what I mean, and it was really, really engaging. I mean, to bring all these people together, that is how you build inclusive cities, you know what I mean?

Now, I see city as breathing, with feeling, you know what I mean? Uh, cause I walk in Dubai, when I look at this city, I see how city connect. When I look around the city, I saw the job creation, you know, I'm not kidding you. The jobs that have been created.

So whoever was planning really have that people center, like, okay, in this city will be sustainable, you know what I mean? So I felt, I felt being here was very powerful as to talk to the city planners, and me to bring my life experience on the table, you know what I mean. And that has been my dream. My dream has been... we don't have to just speak in the slums. We also have to be on the table with the policy makers, and that really happened here.

And they were, and we all agreed, which was amazing. We all agree that the people centered approach is what is important.

For example I remember in Kibera it is a place, women used to be harassed and raped. Why? There's nobody thinking about this, the light, streetlights. When the city was put in that area, women were safe, but how do you know that? Just by listening to the girls and women? It was beautiful to talk about inclusive cities. And I think what the UN Habitat and the partners, and also working with grassroots

leaders like us, what we can achieve, and using existing examples, can be very powerful.

And let's not forget in 2050, almost over 70% of the population will live in urban centers. What's that mean? Like my parents, So we have to start now. Otherwise it will be really a challenge.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: You talked about where we need to go in the future, and I'm wondering what's the starting point today. So after, particularly COVID-19 and we're in the middle of that pandemic, how has that helped or hindered progress on inclusive cities?

KENNEDY ODEDE: We have to accept the truth. We are more behind, but also at the same time we have to appreciate that. COVID is terrible, but it also show us the truth. For us to succeed, we need more investment, okay. At the same time, we need the local voices. Let's work with them... Let's design their spaces.

So the road map that they are taking, which they told me and I saw it, which is human-centered community approach, will really make the world a better place.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: I want to switch gears a little bit because you talked about the white savior complex, and you've also spoken and written very powerfully on the topic of racial barriers that African-led NGOs experience, and SHOFCO have also launched the inaugural world communities forum this year, which tried to flip the dynamics of traditional high-level events from the global lead to grassroots communities. And I'm wondering, what are some of the barriers that still exist today, uh, racially, um, in terms of post-colonial or colonial indeed, uh, um, mindsets of what needs to change?

KENNEDY ODEDE: I'm one of the founders of SHOFKO in the slum, so most of the money come from the west, obviously, you know what I mean. And they have their own playbook that many African nonprofit or entrepreneurs don't know it.

And there's a lot of, racial discrimination that happened. I face it a lot. And then you realize that it's all that colonial mentality. I want to help you, but when I'm helping you, you don't do anything. Whatever I give you to take, you say thank you. That's colonial, you know, so what I'm really talking about here is, what about partnership? I am not saying no to anybody from our side, we are saying that, please, respect us. You might be coming with your education, but don't forget people in this community also have PhD of life experience that you don't have. So, and nothing is for free. You are also coming here, you have to learn. With your money, you cannot do anything, you know. You need us too. So also, let's have the same seat on the table. Let's talk as partners.

So another example is this amazing story that happened to me. So one day I met these people. We were living in Kibera. "Hey, you don't have toilets. I say, yea yea. I want to build a toilet." You know what they did for us, a high classic toilet for us with some water. One of the local leaders says, "This is my house and that toilet turned to a house, after now." And I can see these people going like, "We built a toilet in Kibera." I'm sorry. You build a house for one person, who was a leader. So I want to bring up that we have to really understand the dynamic, and understand who you are. You are coming from a powerful country, you are going to this community so respect them. What I'm asking for is called dignity, dignity, dignity. Are you treating local partners with dignity as you would treat other foundations?

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: And, and what do you think international donors and policymakers need to do today to empower dignity, and decision-making at the local and community-led level, uh, rather than also large NGOs?

KENNEDY ODEDE: I think they have to change their game. You know, you cannot come up with a complicated style with the same way American people apply for the same thing. So let's be, let's be cautious. Right now, development is a culture. Okay. The way it's done in London or in the US this way... And they're putting us in the same place on the data, the metrics, you know what I mean.

Understand you're here, there is this community. I want to build a level in this community. Okay. Who do I talk to? Okay. There's more than data. Okay. How can they report that? Maybe they don't even have a computer in the community. You know what I mean, you know, but you're told to reply, to write responses every week. It does work well for America, whereby computers are there, you know what I mean? So they have to understand that to fight poverty or to do anything, you need to understand the dynamic, the culture of the community you are working with.

And you have to know that... you also have to know that, they are also important. I mean, we have to remove this savior complex, you know what I mean, because I'm saving you. I don't care about you. I'm saving you, look at that word. I am saving you. You are tiny, you are useless. But when you're a partner, let's sit down. Why can't we co-design programs together? That'll be the best thing to do. And I think that's what we discussed with the UN Habitat. They are really working on how to co-create, you know what I mean. You cannot create something for me in London, in New York, in Los Angeles. [It] will not work.

MUSIC

KENNEDY ODEDE: There's a story of... in Makoko, a slum in Nigeria. So I saw there a whole school was floating on water. Amazing. They said, "Kennedy, some people came from a very, very big university." Okay. "In the US". I won't say the name of the university. Okay. And they were trying to build a school with technology. I'm like, ha. "You know what happened to Kennedy? Their school sink, with all their PhD. And ours is still there." And I was like wow. These stupid people. They can just come and ask, how is your school floating, and how can you make it bigger? Literally.

So it's very important to always listen, real listening. That's how we'll fight poverty by listening and understanding the situation on the ground.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: As we wrap up, um, I'll also share... We read in a 2009 blog post that 25-year-old Kennedy wrote these words, which was, "I woke up a happy man, and my heart was pumping with the words I never gave up. This was the energy that kept me going throughout the whole day." So as a final question for our younger listeners who may be hearing you today, and maybe on the verge of giving up, what is your advice to them?

KENNEDY ODEDE: There is something I've learned in my life, and I think young people have to learn about this too, you know what I mean. I believe that there is no challenge that will be allowed to come your way that you cannot handle. And then I also believe that there is two in one in us. One that tells you like, "Ah give up, give up." I don't know if I'm crazy, but there's two. I have two voices. I don't know about other people, other young people. But like, you know, "Don't give up, don't give up," you know. And right now young people, we are faced by a bigger challenge with this mental health.

And social media is also part of that. People are showing you 5% of good life. Okay. And they are hiding the 95%. And as a young person you look at that and say, "Oh, look at that. Look at my life." No, no, no, no. Every moment in life that you think you are giving up, just remind yourself, what is your purpose of living? Is it to give up?

You will never figure out things quickly. I don't think I knew I'd be where I am today, you know what I mean, but let's keep on trying. So when I was feeling lonely and hopeless, and I could see the earth as a ball, and the sun was that hope, at the end of the tunnel, you know, that light you see. And I'm like, "Kennedy, oh, I don't know what I'm going to eat. Life is too tough. So should I give up?" There's a moment I felt to take away my life, but every time I remember that the ball, the earth is going round, is going round, is going round, and the sunlight is gonna come.

And I knew that Kennedy, you will never be in this hard situation forever. It goes around the clock, tick, tick, and the sun is going. The sun is there. Just the sun is there, is there, you know, the earth is turning. You know, and then you see the light.

So my friend, any young person listening to this, whatever you're going through, the sun is coming. The earth is rotating around the sun. And even to me now, every time I'm happy, I see the sun, I still know, "Kennedy, Kennedy, remember, it's not the light time of a sun. Anything can happen, but never forget, it will come back."

Anyway, so that's my message for young people. Thank you so much.

TARIQ AL OLAIMY: Thank you, Kennedy. And you're the sun in so many people's lives. And you've said before that, when people meet you, they can't believe you're Kennedy Odede, because you're not "Kennedy Odede enough", and because you're a "simple and ordinary man" in your words. But listening to you today, I wish

that every human being was as simple, as ordinary, as brilliant, as committed to service as you are. Thank you so much for your time, asante.

KENNEDY ODEDE: Thank you. Thank you brother. Thank you so much. Asante. Keep in touch.

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