

THE MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION



**"THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AND – ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS THAT
WORK AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE"**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS
BY**

**DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM
CHAIRMAN OF THE MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION**

AT

THE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS WORKSHOP

Organized by
Institute of Development Studies (IDS UDSM)

In Collaboration with
the North West University of South Africa,
Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) and the
National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa

**15TH MARCH 2004
(COURTYARD HOTEL)
DAR ES SALAAM**

**Chairperson,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to have been given this opportunity to be with you this morning on the occasion of this important workshop.

I would like at the outset, to welcome all the participants here present. I wish to extend a special welcome to our country and to Dar es Salaam to all those of you who have come from outside Tanzania.

It is also fitting to take this opportunity to congratulate the organizers and sponsors of this workshop who made it possible for all of us to assemble here this morning to share ideas on the subject of "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development". This is an area which is both topical and important for our continent. The Institute of Development Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam (IDS –

UDSM); Indigenous Knowledge Systems Programme at the North West University in South Africa (who are co-organizing this workshop); and the National Research Foundation (NRF) of the South Africa and the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) - the main sponsors of the workshop – all deserve our profound appreciation.

We are gathered here specifically to examine the relationship between Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development in SADC Countries. Clearly, the subject of the Workshop relates very closely with the philosophy of African Renaissance and the vision of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

At the very outset
It is pertinent to point out that a large part of African societies continue to survive and thrive mainly through the bearings of traditional structures, institutions, norms, values, and practices. For us in the SADC region as indeed in Africa as a whole, socio-economic and political life for the bulk of our people is still driven *inter alia* by traditional knowledge. The impact of globalization upon this domain and particularly the framework that is being put in place to direct its

development is an issue that touches the very core of survival for our societies.

This becomes all the more necessary because Africa is entering the new millennium while also initiating major processes of change and transformation. In the past two decades, the Continent has gone through a devastating experience in which it found itself bedeviled by rampant conflicts, devastated by the HIV-AIDS pandemic; gripped by a severe economic retrogression, afflicted with widespread perversion in governance, and threatened by being marginalized in the global system. It is now determined to make a turn-around and set the Continent towards a new trajectory.

It is the character of this new dynamic of change, being rooted in the inner reservoir of the African people and their unity and resolve to carve out a new destiny for themselves, that is reminiscent of the profound transformation that took place during the era of the Renaissance in medieval Europe. There is an endeavour in Africa, which is vigorously gaining momentum, to embark into a process of

renewal and revitalization in order to enable the people better control their own destiny. The driving force of this process of renewal is the unity and solidarity of the African people fostered through a shared value system, cultural heritage, and common historical experience.

As it enters the new millennium Africa finds itself with no choice but to harness its collective energy in restoring peace, security and stability; in containing catastrophic pandemics; and in eradicating the pervasive and abject poverty. A dynamic has also been set in motion to promote systems of governance that are integrative, democratic, and which respect the rule of law. The Continent is ardently striving to assume its rightful place in the international arena.

Similarly, the deadly silence that had enveloped the people of our Continent regarding the killer pandemic HIV-AIDS is gradually breaking down, and we are beginning to share knowledge and take measures in containing its spread. The launching of the African Union in Durban, South Africa two years ago, marked a significant

movement forward in Africa's efforts in enhancing cooperation and integration and towards the realization of the long time dream of a united Africa. The new framework of integration embodied in the AU, and encompassing a wider space of collective action and a more vibrant mode of joint engagement, will allow Africa to harness effectively its collective strength.

On the whole, there is a new political, economic and social culture evolving in Africa. At the Continental level, the new culture is encapsulated in the reinvigoration of the spirit of Pan-Africanism in which the people of Africa are determined to work together. At the local level the new culture is embodied in the quest to promote the empowerment of the people so that they can shape their destiny by harnessing their communal and historical assets that are revitalized by the benefits of modern day scientific and technological developments.

Support to Africa's transformation essentially involves bolstering its efforts towards consolidating cooperation and integration at the

Continental level and its determination to promote popular empowerment. It is in this regard where Africa's traditional knowledge becomes a critical element in the realization of the objectives of Africa's Renaissance.

Chairperson,

We have gathered here to contribute to the on going debate on the growth and development of our Continent – Africa; and our Sub region, SADC - now and the future. As we do so, I believe we are all agreed that the revival or rebirth of the continent (i.e. African Renaissance) will have to be fundamentally based on African's own resources – its peoples, communities, natural resources, experiences, knowledge base – including Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

As you no doubt know, in a continent which in the past few decades has been plagued by armed conflicts, famine and political upheaval, the notion of an African Renaissance may have seemed like a dream. But today it is becoming a reality. Launched in 1994 by

MADIBA, Africa's Living Legend, the concept of an African Renaissance has been championed by South Africa's current President Thabo Mbeki.

The dream of a rebirth captures the essence of revitalization that flowed through Europe between the 14th and 16th centuries producing scholars like Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare, artists like Da Vinci, Michaelangelo and Rembrandt and great scientists like Galileo. The European awakening marked the transition from the mediaeval to the modern world and was a milestone in the continent's history.

Our own Renaissance is long overdue. We come from a truly impressive continent – the world's second largest, covering more than one-fifth of the earth's land surface with a population of over 800 million people. This vast land in which more than 800 languages and dialects are spoken is home to a stunning diversity of cultures and tradition.

In spite of the many burdens of history that have marked Africa over the centuries, the dawning of the new millennium offers many opportunities for those who are willing to capitalize on them. The political emancipation of people following independence has led to a sense of pride in our own ways of life, and recognition of the contribution we can make to global development in terms of our own traditions. In making Africa's Renaissance a meaningful reality, action has to be taken on a multidimensional level including political, cultural and social.

African renaissance is, fundamentally, a rejection of Afro-pessimism. But it is a rejection that is not necessarily romantic. Nor does it seek to gloss over the problems of Africa. The negative forces in the development process are taken into account, given their African origin as well as their external ramifications. In this regard, the dialectics of imperialism and struggles for national liberation need to be seen as providing the context within which this rebirth or renaissance is to take place.

The African Renaissance in its proper historical context is essentially also the rise of all peoples of the world, with Africa descent from slavery, colonialism, segregation, apartheid, and neo-colonialism. It is not a single event but a process long begun but far from being concluded. There have been many episodes, spanning several generations, in the rise of the Africans universally from the forces that put them down. It is a continuing revolution that unfolds towards the total liberation of people of African origin in the political, economic, cultural, educational, technological and social spheres. In its wake, it liberates those Frantz Fanon described as the '*wretched of the earth*', wherever they may be and in every sphere of life.

The philosophy of African Renaissance as propagated by African leaders such as President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa marks a coming-of-age in modern African politics. It promotes further the idea of Pan Africanism, that people of African descent have common interests and should work together to overcome racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and underdevelopment. Africa's destiny undoubtedly lies with the African peoples themselves. In such circumstances,

designing a collective response which transcends structural differences and other conditions peculiar to a specific country, are absolutely necessary and immediate. I believe this is one of the objectives this workshop aspires to achieve.

The necessity for solidarity and devising common strategies to implement the philosophy of African Renaissance calls for greater interaction among all people of African origin within and outside the continent. This process should be based on grassroots strategies which involve the ownership and control of the African Renaissance process by ordinary citizens. This is due to the experience that renaissance efforts in the past, such as Black consciousness in South Africa and Negritude among people of African descent living under French colonialism, were limited in their impact largely owing to the fact that they did not take hold among ordinary citizens, never entered popular discourse, were not translated into the languages people could understand and speak themselves. They remained, to a large extent, the exclusive preserve of a limited African elite.

Nevertheless, current discourse that underlies the African Renaissance is still opaque and obscure to the vast majority of the African people. Very few African language speakers can even translate the concept into their first languages.

Therefore, as Africans, we need to devise strategies which involve and are built on local community experiences. In this context, Indigenous Knowledge Systems has been identified as a critical vehicle for the mobilization, and rooting the Renaissance Movement with local communities. As indeed will be made clear by the subsequent presenters to the workshop, Indigenous Knowledge Systems refers to the complex set of knowledge and technologies that people in a given community develop over time, for enhancing production and distribution of material goods and services needed for improving and sustaining peoples well being. It is based on experience, often tested over centuries through use; adapted to local culture and environment; dynamic and changing through interfacing with other knowledge systems.

Chairperson,

It is becoming abundantly clear that growth and development in our time, is driven by, more than anything else, knowledge. While Africa will still benefit from cycles or demand for commodities, the single important factor that will determine and influence sustained growth and development of the Continent to-day and in the foreseeable future will be the Continent's capacity to access and use efficiently and effectively knowledge resources to its own advantage and that of its people. The challenge before us then is clearly how to 'fast track' the process of drawing disadvantaged sectors of our communities into the circle of benefits of the knowledge revolution which is currently taking place world wide at a terrific pace.

You will, I believe, agree with me that if one looks at the current global race for knowledge, one sees the increasing use of knowledge and technology to add value to business transactions. This creates what is now known as the global knowledge economy and the so called global race for knowledge. There is mounting

evidence to suggest that the global race for knowledge works against developing nations - especially those of Africa, because they do not have the capacity to participate effectively in this race. In turn, this has generated a new kind of poverty, i.e. *INFORMATION POVERTY*. Several global initiatives have been put in place to enable Developing nations to tap global knowledge resources for good governance and livelihood securities; but the participation of local African institutions, organizations and partnerships in the local environment have been woefully inadequate to handle the new demands of the 'knowledge world'.

Additionally, African communities and institutions have been unable to participate effectively in these initiatives due to lack of awareness, poor capacities and qualities of human and technological resources. This can be demonstrated with the impact of the Development Gateway in Africa, where after nearly two years of existence globally, only one African country (Namibia) had an active Gateway as at January 2002. It is sad to say that many African academics and researchers are not even aware of the Global

Development Network (GDN) that seeks to create virtual knowledge sharing communities for economic development. Schools and teachers are generally not well enough informed about the World Links for Development and have thus been unable to participate fully and effectively in these initiatives and in similar other opportunities.

The plain fact is that, the world has changed so much due to globalization and so has the role of knowledge systems and technologies. Globalization has set off a 'knowledge race' in order to lay claim to other people's knowledge systems, which could be exploited and marketed for profit. The dominance of English as a language of communication also excludes the majority of local communities in our Continent who do not follow the language.

All these developments present a great challenge to African researchers, academics, and governments to take the issue of knowledge and technology very seriously if Africa is to benefit from the globalising world. The global race for knowledge calls African governments to develop codes of conduct with regard to the

interaction between researchers, speculators of knowledge systems and local communities. This is to ensure that the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) of local communities as producers and holders of Indigenous Knowledge are not abused and exploited for profit by others. There must be mechanisms and structures in place to ensure that the producers and holders of community knowledge systems have access, control over and also benefit from that knowledge. The issue of the language of interaction between scholars and communities needs to be taken seriously to avoid the alienation of local communities in the research process; and distortion of their knowledge context. The use of indigenous concepts in Indigenous Knowledge Systems should be promoted if Indigenous Knowledge Systems is to have a meaning to those who produce and use it directly in their daily lives.

Protection of traditional knowledge presents a remarkable opportunity for developing countries that are for examples rich in culture to profit from the international intellectual property system.

Chairperson,

In the context of Africa, the protection of traditional knowledge has a particular bearing on the management and utilization of Africa's diverse biodiversity in a more sustainable manner for the good of the entire human community. Authorities on the subject have warned us that it is unrealistic to talk about conservation and sustainable use of genes, species and ecosystems which provide habitat to sustain them without bringing into that equation the factor of human culture. Traditional knowledge is the building block upon which environmental security is anchored in much of Africa today. Indeed, the development of sustainable agricultural systems by and large still depends upon the innovative capacities of our peasants, pastoralists and fishermen.

This imposes an element of obligation on all of us. It means that to conserve genetic resources for future generations, then we must be concerned not only with rescuing genetic materials and species from the tropical centers of their diversity but also with the

recognition and by rewarding and protecting traditional knowledge systems which have produced and maintained the biological riches over centuries. Ultimately, we cannot conserve the world's biological diversity unless we also nurture the human diversity that protects and develops it. If we undervalue or ignore traditional knowledge of the peasants and other rural communities who use the biodiversity on a daily basis, we lose our last best hope of sustaining the living resources upon which we all depend.

Traditional knowledge in medicine and pharmacology has a rich tradition in African cultural practices. And yet the commercial value of such traditional based knowledge has yet to be translated into a source of wealth creation within Africa itself. On the contrary, that knowledge continues to make substantial contributions to the projects of drug manufacturing outside the Continent. Similarly, a substantial component of plant-based prescription drugs derive from the prior use in traditional medicine, and indeed large profits are obtained from such industries. And yet, in spite of its rich biodiversity and genetic resource base, Africa does not benefit from this potential of wealth creation.

Indeed, there is a general consensus that without effective protection the cultural and intellectual assets of communities in Africa and elsewhere will continue to be abused and violated. It is acknowledged by all that currently there is widespread misuse and unauthorized reproduction of works of art, designs and even cultural expressions such as languages, folklore, songs and dances. Collections of indigenous cultural materials, ancestral remains and items that are important to the cultural identity of the people are being taken out and deposited in museums outside the Continent.

Indigenous biological and ecological knowledge is being appropriated without consent by bio-prospecting firms which convert the century-old creativity into multi-billion dollar industries, often after very minor modifications. And even research, including that on the Human Genome, often use the histories and records of African families and cultural lives, without their prior informed consent.

The issue of protection is, therefore, of relevant importance. However, in the context of Africa such protection should, first and foremost, recognize the specific role and characteristics of cultural and knowledge systems in the life of the people.

What Africa effectively needs is a system that protects the essential nature of its rich diversity of cultures and ecology so that it can continue to evolve, thrive and enhance its capacity to surmount the formidable challenges facing the people.

The system should enable the Continent to continue giving to humanity the services it has been giving with respect to the conservation and sustainable use of its biodiversity, and to the advancement of art, music, literature and science. Such a system of rights should in no way restrict or impose upon the customary norms and especially the cultural and biodiversity flows that have evolved over the millennia. Indeed, Africa's diversity and the knowledge derived from it, have been the basis of its survival, and should remain the motor as it embarks into its Renaissance.

An important constraint for the promotion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems within the context of the African Renaissance is the creation and promotion of *partnerships* between African scholars and local communities in identifying, documenting and sharing experiences on existing community knowledge systems. These partnerships would help to bridge the gap which currently exists between African intellectuals and local communities. This gap has delayed the process of development in various countries on the continent that have struggled for liberation. The gap is also a factor in the subjugation of and their under-utilization for sustainable development in our Continent and sub region. The partnerships would also help in countering the effects of the dislocation of intellectuals from their communities.

Removal of these constraints will contribute to the process of transforming the African continent and the SADC sub region which is the cornerstones of the African Renaissance. It will also put on the continental agenda the need for fundamental shifts in existing

paradigms as well as the parameters of knowledge. Whereas modern science and technology might facilitate the transfer of knowledge, the holistic and community-based character of will contribute to the development of humanity and will have an impact on the manner in which African countries relate one another.

African scholars, research institutions, Governments and Indigenous Knowledge Systems practitioners, need to develop and promote working partnership and links among themselves to share the limited resources available to them and local experiences they have. They also need to develop partnerships with their counterparts in other developing countries of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. These countries share certain commonalities with Africa in terms of historical, cultural and colonial experiences. This will be part of promoting South-South relations and cooperation in their respective fields.

The shift in the existing bases of Indigenous Knowledge in Africa including various forms of partnerships will empower African

countries as well as their peoples because they require that we generate and articulate new ideas to transform our societies. The Indigenous Knowledge Systems are pregnant with this possibility, more so if effective partnerships are put in place, and if the resources, space and time for innovation are created. To achieve this, African governments, the private sector, the universities, and the indigenous intellectuals and practitioners themselves must come to believe that and resources are a continental heritage and development resource. They must work together as partners to promote growth, development, competitiveness, employment, human resources; protect and sustain the environment, and promote the exchange of information.

There is optimism, following growing interest, in African Indigenous Knowledge Systems - both globally and within Africa itself. African academic and research institutions as well as Governments are making Indigenous Knowledge Systems an important focus area for research, teaching and community outreach. This creates an enabling environment in the pursuit of the African

Renaissance because this re-awakening encourages more and more people to come into the fore. The globalization process has made it imperative. Africa is seen as part of the global village. There is increasing realization that in order for the world to be a peaceful place and thrive in economic growth Africa must be taken out of its marginal position.

Development Agencies and Partners are slowly realizing the importance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. They see as a valuable resource that can be used to improve the impact of their development assistance. This is based on the realization that Indigenous Knowledge is the largest single resource not yet fully mobilized in many development enterprises, and that this knowledge gives African countries and communities a very powerful asset and strategy in adapting themselves to the impact of the globalising world. Various development agencies in various parts of the continent are developing and supporting mechanisms to help indigenous people promote their own systems of employment and income generation while at the same time safeguarding their traditional knowledge,

heritage and culture. This is done by strengthening their local organizations, institutions and cultures.

This also suggests that African scholars, research institutions and governments as well. They need to create the right environment for more action research and promotion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems by taking advantage of the forces of globalization including ICT for promoting and marketing African heritage and associated knowledge systems for poverty eradication and sustainable development.

This also suggests ~~that~~ very strongly that African researchers and groups – such as the group gathered here this morning have to engage in research and training which uses Indigenous Knowledge as a basis for innovation and Sustainable Development in the Continent. For this to happen, our intellectuals must accept that indigenous knowledge is based on a deep understanding and familiarity with the natural local world; it is a social tool that has maintained and sustained people in countries and environments which have been

hostile to them. Furthermore, indigenous knowledge, which needs legal protection, can contribute to the African Renaissance by being integrated into curricula at all educational levels, and by being integrated into enterprises whose benefits contribute to the sustainable livelihoods of the communities where that knowledge is generated and located. And finally, Indigenous Knowledge Systems to be Continuous in our societies and to be embedded within the structures of productive sectors in our communities must find expression in focused and realistic research agendas of our development research institutions in the continent and in the sub region.

Chairperson,

Allow me in conclusion to return to the ceremonial function I was asked to perform this morning – officiating the opening of this workshop. As I have already mentioned, this workshop addresses a very important development issue in our Continent – Indigenous Knowledge Systems for development. It is, thus, a well targeted and

focused workshop. The workshop is also very timely – it is held at a time when Africa has rededicated itself to achieving its renaissance – its rebirth and revival.

I am impressed to learn that the workshop will deliberate on, amongst other things, the status of IKS in the sub region; developing a research agenda for IKS; designing IKS training curricular, designing mechanisms for linking IKS research results with policy making, designing IKS outreach programmes and so forth.

I believe that, Africa and SADC are looking forward to seeing action-oriented outputs from your deliberations – outputs that can be implemented for improving the welfare of our people.

I am most encouraged by the profiles of the participants attending this workshop. You are a group that combines researchers, intellectuals, policy makers, policy implementers, development aid professionals, NGO and CBO activists etc. You are a

well-balanced group made of very committed and experienced professionals, experts, and activists.

I am very confident that you will have productive deliberations and come out with workable outputs – outputs which will aim at enhancing the effective use of Indigenous Knowledge Systems for the continuous improvement of the welfare of the mass of our peoples within the SADC sub region and the Continent as a whole.

In this context I would like to remind you of the succinct remarks made by a South African poet and writer Dr. Wally Serote, who once remarked:

'The masses of Africa have been and are the inherent incubators of IKS, they've left us a legacy'.

He continued:

'All generations have their tasks, past generations have fulfilled theirs – now it is our turn. Many of us are a dream of many generations'

Chairperson,

It is now my pleasure and privilege to declare this Workshop on
Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Sustainable Development in
SADC officially opened.

Thank you for your attention.