

THE MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION



**"IS DEMOCRATIZATION POSSIBLE WITHOUT
GOOD GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPARENCY?"**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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AT

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**“IS DEMOCRATIZATION POSSIBLE WITHOUT
GOOD GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPARENCY?”**

**Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Africa has witnessed dramatic changes in the last few decades. These changes have come as a result of the struggles of the African people themselves and the changes in the international system. Twenty-five years ago most of Africa was ruled either by one-party system or military regimes. Now that is the thing of the past, and the quest for democracy, development, good governance and transparency seems to permeate throughout the continent. It is not that there have not been setbacks here and there, but the process of democratization in Africa seems to be irreversible.

Africa is a diverse continent. To that extent, *there are several Africas* despite a common colonial background and a shared marginal role in the global economy. Nevertheless, different countries have attained different levels of economic and social development, and different levels of democratization. Such countries as South Africa and Mauritius, amongst others, appear to have made considerable progress on both the economic and democratic fronts. To the extent that there is a great deal of *diversity* in country experiences, resource endowments and therefore *development levels*, there can be no ‘*one shoe fits all*’ in any analytical or prescriptive perspectives.

Democracy has been defined as “rule of the people by the people for the people”, a political system that allows citizens to freely choose their government through fair elections, and accords them adequate participation in national affairs. A democracy is a system in which national affairs are run in a transparent and

accountable manner. The key features of a democracy primarily consist of the following:

- an electoral system that guarantees free and fair elections as well as universal suffrage;
- a system of representation with well-functioning political parties and interest groups;
- a system of checks and balances based on separation of powers, with independent judicial and legislative branches;
- a vibrant civil society, able to monitor government and private business;
- a free and independent media; and
- an effective civilian control over the military and other security forces [UNDP, 2000].

It can be argued that the process of building democracy is a protracted one that stretches over generations. No society can be described as completely democratic. Building democracy is better understood as a 'work in progress'. This process sometimes termed *democratization* proceeds at different rates in different countries. In Africa, while some countries have nurtured multiparty democracy for many years, others scrapped the system for several decades before re-adopting it in the 1990's. The issues that emerge from current debates in Africa on democracy are which democratic arrangements or order appears best capable of serving Africa's needs in the current conjuncture. Which democratic foundations and structures appear to sustain good governance better in contemporary Africa?

What is governance? As a process in which collective power is utilized for the realization of common objectives, governance involves continuous actions and interactions of individuals, groups and institutions in diverse and dynamic ways. The ultimate objective and proof of good governance is the sustainable political, social, economic and cultural well-being of a people. Therefore, the point of

departure for improving governance in any country is the analysis and appreciation of the situation not only in terms of political, administrative and systematic governance, but also in terms of economic and social well-being of the people.

Good Governance is informed by five principles:

- Transparency in all areas of public domain;
- Efficiency in public institutions and effectiveness in the delivery of services;
- Accountability;
- Legitimacy; and
- Predictability.

Good governance takes place when the process is conducted within the framework of a written constitution, or in the framework of constitutionalism, the separation of powers, rule of law, the codes of ethics and conduct, as well as long-established customs and traditions practiced universally. Good governance is also a process sensitive to the basic needs, wishes and aspirations of the people; is based on sound, efficient organizational and operational principles; and is transparent and accountable. Leadership, competence, political will, integrity and capacity are critical to the promotion of good governance.

In Africa, the struggle for independence was a struggle for democracy and the observance and protection of human rights. It could not have been the intention of the visionary leaders who spearheaded that struggle to replace one form of oppression with another. Certainly it could not have been the aspiration of the African people to accept bad governance simply because it was imposed upon them by fellow Africans. However, as Africa moved from colonial rule to independence, the post-colonial struggles changed both in form and content. In some parts of Africa, the institutions that were designed to promote and strengthen democracy and good governance became, by and large, integral

instruments of Executive power, legitimizing what the Executive wanted legitimized. In time, it became an unfortunate reality that these institutions, supposedly of democracy, often proclaimed as right what the state leadership wanted and as wrong what was not acceptable to the state leadership. Governance in Africa came to be seen through the prism of the totality of the exercise of power in the management of a country's affairs. This is why in Africa the discourse on governance has to be predicated upon the basic and intrinsic value of the need for the Executive and other political forces to recognize the limits of power.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What are the lessons that we have learnt from the African experience so far? For me the following could constitute significant issues that would have to be borne in mind.

First, let us admit that good governance, accountability and transparency (one side of the same coin) strengthen the legitimacy of any government, its officials and policies in the eyes of the people. They contribute to giving individuals and groups the sense that they as citizens are truly in charge of their destiny.

The second thought, I would like to have with you, relates to the fact that in most parts of the continent, the public sector (that is the government), remains pervasive in political, economic and social matters. This makes political power an important channel for accessing and controlling economic and social resources. Transparency and accountability as universally known and accepted, strengthen public understanding and support thereby protecting democratic processes against demagoguery and other forces that likely to undermine democratic governance.

By the same token, a transparent electoral process increases the likelihood that election results will be readily accepted by all the competing parties. Ideally, it should lead to good and accountable governance. In turn, efficient or effective government will strengthen the institutions that will bring about a consolidation of democracy and enhance the quality and substance of governance. Ultimately, these processes should bring about more competence, integrity, honesty, legitimacy and accountability on the part of those who govern.

Fourthly, economic reforms are more likely to be regarded as legitimate and therefore easier and faster to implement, politically and socially, if there is full confidence that the process is that underlie such reforms, are transparent and that both public and private office holders meet the highest standards of accountability.

My fifth observation is that lack of administrative transparency and accountability renders technical expertise, ineffective and unrewarding. At the same time, it corrodes the moral backbone of public service. A corrupt bureaucracy undermines the effectiveness of democratic institutions and over burdens the private sector. Corruption, for instance by police or customs officials as the experience in many countries has shown, can be as damaging to the legitimacy of democracy as the grand corruption often highlighted by organizations such as Transparency International which, in recent times, has been doing some excellent work in different parts of the world and in Africa in particular.

Stretching the argument further, let us finally admit that corruption has become a world-wide phenomenon and not just an African concern. Corruption, no matter where it raises its ugly head permeates all segments of the society and apart from the public service, the private sector has become far from being immune to corruption. As we have now unfortunately come to learn and accept, much corruption, both between and within countries, occurs at the interface between public and the private sector. Corruption entails a number of categories of costs

to society, among them, losses in economic efficiency, distortions of incentives and distribution loss of political legitimacy by government institutions, dilution of the work ethic and damage to the moral fabric of society.

In order to fight corruption, a two-pronged strategy must be adopted. These include, economic and social reforms, as well as building and strengthening of Institutions and International Capacity. Such institutional capacity in turn, requires strengthening the civil society and the mass media, strengthening of government watchdog Agencies by among other things, ensuring that such Agencies have adequate human financial and logistical resources (both qualitatively and quantitatively) to engage in appropriate work, with streamlined procedures, investigation powers and adequate independence. Fortunately, we are beginning to see the entrenchment of such watchdog Agencies in many African Countries and the impact is already being felt.

Let us add to the foregoing, the urgent need to strengthen the Agencies and Departments in charge of Electoral processes so as to be able to safeguard the integrity and credibility of elections and of democracy itself.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this point, let me observe, that contrary to stereotyped images that are regularly flashed around the world by the so-called Afro-pessimists about Africa, there is nothing intrinsic about the continent, that predisposes it to corruption or creates a vacuum of transparency and accountability. However, we must also be honest enough to admit that corruption and sometimes the lack of transparency and accountability in the handling of the affairs of the State, can and has created enormous damage in Africa, economically, socially, politically and psychologically, as the continent adopts economic and political reform measures, to democratize and to benefit from the so-called phenomenon of globalization.

Another important area that I should like to highlight is the whole issue of Constitutionalism in Africa. I am aware that Constitutions in virtually all African countries, provide for the establishment and maintenance of transparent and accountable systems. The problem the way I see it, has always been with the manner in which these Systems had performed. In most African countries, the Constitution contains eloquent proclamations of aspirations and intentions often articulated in ways that fail to mobilize the political will for action and adjudication. To become operational and meaningful as foundations for good governance transparency and accountability, Constitutions in Africa must be home grown, indigenized and wholly owned by Africans to reflect their historical experience, needs and aspirations. Today, a vast majority of African Constitutions, tend to be perceived as an esoteric document whose content and purpose can only be understood and even manipulated by powerful political leaders. Accountability and transparency unfortunately, still remain mysterious concepts in a small part of Africa.

In the area of elections, the experience of some African countries, reveal mixed results. It is often the case, that in the absence of other avenues for social mobility, economic self-advancement and prestige, the struggle over democracy and elections, has focused on the desire of ambitious political leaders, to capture or cling on to the State apparatus, particularly, where elections are perceived in a winner-takes-all context. Under such circumstances, democratic multiparty elections may degenerate into corruption-prone processes, in which the vast majority of the electorate, traditionally unaccustomed to challenging the powers that be, is disenfranchised politically.

To further complicate the problem just highlighted, many Parliaments in Africa lack the political motivation and incentives to challenge incumbent governments or their policies, programmes and budget submissions. Voting rules (winner-takes-all) often result in a lopsided Ruling majority, that carefully guards

information concerning its internal workings and other matters, from minority scrutiny.

For the third arm of the State, the Judiciary, it is a well-known fact that the independence of the Judiciary in many African countries is constitutionally guaranteed under the principle of separation of powers. African countries have written laws and regulations with penalties of varying severity for embezzlement of public funds as well as bribery and other types of corruption. Again the major problem always is with the actualization and implementation of these well thought out legal systems.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the nature of a distinguished Forum such as this, the last issue I want to highlight before ending this presentation, relates to the role of External Partners in promoting good governance, transparency and democracy, especially in Africa. Clearly, External players such as Multilateral and Bilateral donors, international development Partners, NGOs and Multi National Corporations, are, to varying degrees and in different ways involved in activities designed to promote and sustain transparent and accountable systems. However, much more remains to be done. Suffice is to say, that there is a joint responsibility for Africans and non-Africans alike, in the true spirit of partnership to engage in introspection. Such soul searching and remedial actions to overcome past difficulties should be to the mutual advantage of our common humanity or the so-called global village. For me, it would be a better recipe than the blame game that we all indulge in, but which has failed to lay a better foundation for the future. I strongly believe that we want to bequeath to succeeding generations, the possibilities of democratic transparent and accountable societies and systems.

Speaking as an African, I should like to conclude by again underscoring the fact that transparency and accountability are characteristics of good governance and

totally consistent with democracy. Indeed, the long-term legitimacy and the survival of African democracies as well as the economic social cultural and moral well being of African Nations are intrinsically linked to these principles.

Thank you for your attention.