

SPEECH BY HON. AMBASSADOR DR. PIUS Y. NG'WANDU (MP), MINISTER
FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE UNITED
REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA ON CHALLENGES OF POVERTY REDUCTION IN
AFRICA: THE WAY FORWARD FROM THE HIGHER EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE
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President of the Association of African Universities (AAU)
Chancellor of the University of Mauritius Rectors of Universities
Vice Chancellors
Presidents of African Universities Distinguished Conference Participants Ladies and
Gentlemen

1.0 Introduction

Mr. President and distinguished conference participants

Let me from the outset express my appreciation first to the Secretary General of the AAU, Prof. Francois Rajaosm and to the Conference organizers for inviting me in my capacity as MINEDAF chairperson to participate in this very important event.

I feel particularly honoured by the Association of African Universities for according me an opportunity to give some introductory remarks at the start of your conference. The theme of my presentation *will* be on the "*Challenges of Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Way Forward From the Higher Education Perspective*". I will in my presentation attempt to highlight the extent of the poverty problem in Africa, the strategies already on the ground, and finally, the way forward from the perspective of higher education. It is my hope that distinguished conference participants will find time to discuss in detail some of the issues raised in my presentation in the subsequent sessions of your conference. Our Governments are eagerly waiting for the recommendations of your conference.

2.0 The extent of the Poverty Problem in Africa Honourable Conference Participants, The poverty problem in Africa has, for some time now been a subject of interest that has been extensively discussed at international forums within and outside the continent. The discussions have tended to converge on the basic fact that economic growth and poverty reduction have remained elusive goals throughout most of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region. This is partly so because aggregate economic performance in the SSA has been worse when compared to other regions of the world. This fact is easily substantiated from the various reports including those by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and others generated by institutions within Africa which have tended to point to a considerable fall of per capita income in most of SSA countries. The World Bank and the UNDP attempt to measure the incidence of poverty on certain criteria.

Currently the World Bank uses an international poverty measure, according to which the poverty of a country is determined by the percentage of the population that lives on less than one US Dollar a day. In 1997 on the average 47% of Africa's population lived below this poverty line. It is estimated that in the 21St century

about 480 million people in Africa will still be living under the poverty line. The UNDP Human Development Index assesses national poverty by combining GNP p.c. with life expectancy and access to education while taking into account provision of basic human needs. The measures confirm the fact that in our countries there exists a large mass of people who are marginalized and remain out of the national and global markets.

Poverty prevents the poor from participation. It brutalizes and alienates people. Poverty prevents or denies the individual and society access to education science and technology. Since the modern world Science and Technology are decisive forces in propelling development, Scientific and technological poverty is the worst poverty to experience. It is a truism that our African countries are technologically and scientifically destitute Africa has only 0.3% of the number of Engineers in the World; 0.23% of the computers and spends less than 1% of its GDP on research and Development. Yet the world demand for products and services with a high technological content is growing by 15% p.a. and the demand for raw materials semi processed goods will only be between 3 and 5% only in foreseeable future.

Distinguished conference participants The problem of poverty is compounded by high levels of income inequalities which undermine any prospects for sustainable and equitable economic growth, peace and political stability. Similarly, data for non-income poverty tend to indicate that overall, infant mortality, life expectancy and school enrolment rates in Africa are some of the worst in the world. For example in the SSA 151 children out of 1000 die before the age of 5 and 92 out of 1000 die before the age of 1. Emerging and re-emerging diseases are on the increase and communicable diseases, which are largely preventable, are still contributing largely to the burden of diseases in most of the SSA countries. The life expectancy rate of 50 years and net primary school enrolment rates of 60 per cent currently experienced in Africa are the lowest in the world. Deaths as a result of HIV/AIDS alone have contributed to the lowering of life expectancy, thus wiping out social gains of the last three decades in a number of SSA countries. Unfortunately, higher learning institutions and the highly trained human resource in the public and private sectors have not been spared by the HIV/AIDS scourge.

3.0 Causes of Poverty Mr. President

Research findings have uncovered a number of causes for the incidence and prevalence of poverty in Africa. One of these causes is the low levels of productivity and production technology especially in the agricultural sector, which provide most of the employment and a large share of the continent's GDP and exports. The low rate of the utilization of the ox plough and ox carts are good examples. Yet one does not easily see the debilitating role of the tsetse fly in stagnating the ox plough technology. Investments towards eradication of the tsetse and mosquitoes could pay more dividends. High illiteracy and population growth rates, inadequate infrastructure, the continent-wide problem of gender disparity, civil wars and political instability have all contributed to poverty in Africa.

4.0 Initiatives for Addressing the Poverty Problem in Africa

Honourable Conference Participants Mr. President,
While the Structural Adjustment programmes were meant to improve the economies and reduce poverty in our countries, the outcome of the reform

measures has become another area of contention. In the eyes of some critics, the reforms have contributed to even worse economic and social outcomes and have exacerbated the conditions that lead to poverty and vulnerability. Yet others view the reform measures as a necessary but not sufficient condition for promoting economic growth and reducing poverty in SSA.

Mr. President

Most of us are aware that in Africa poverty exists in the midst of other problems, one of them being external indebtedness. It is estimated that 33 of the 41 countries categorized as Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) are in SSA. Noting the severity of the debt problem, and the burden it exerts on the poor producers of wealth in Africa and other regions, the HIPC initiative was formulated in 1996 by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to address the debt problem and its implications on poverty.

Closely linked to the HIPC initiative is the requirement by IFIs that eligible countries have to prepare in a participatory manner, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). The PRSPs outline not only the priority sectors which have direct linkages with poverty reduction but also the monitoring and evaluation of the poverty reduction process.

In other initiatives like those spearheaded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other bilateral and multilateral development partners, most governments in SSA have included education, health and water in the list of their priority sectors. There is a general consensus that SSA has a greater chance of reducing poverty if these sectors are improved.

Currently initiatives like the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) aim at enabling the continent to reclaim control over its destiny through ensuring that development is both broad and deep in all facets.

That is why it is important to critically analyse the challenges of poverty reduction from Higher Education Perspective in a conference like this one which brings together over 150 University administrators from all over Africa as well as other partner organizations from other parts of the world.

5.0 Poverty Reduction in Africa: The Way Forward from the Higher Education Perspective

Mr. President, There is no doubt that education has a significant contribution not only in economic development but also in poverty reduction. Indeed as observed during the *World Summit for Sustainable Development* in August 2002, no country or region has successfully developed without adequate level of human capital. Countries like Japan, Korea, Taiwan, India and other Asia-Pacific countries have made remarkable economic development through investing in education. In realizing this, African governments have to increase investment allocations in education and to higher education in particular. I mention increased investment in higher education purposely because, I believe that the future of our continent depends on the ability of Universities to generate a critical mass of people who are able to think and apply knowledge to create new opportunities for employment, increased earnings and

improved productivity. All these are important for poverty reduction. Mr. President and Distinguished Conference Participants, Allow me at this point to cite some main challenges currently facing the Higher Education Institutions in Africa towards combating poverty.

(a) Access to higher education

The first challenge to higher education institutions in the SSA is low student enrolment as compared to Asia-Pacific region. Universities in the region must open up and increase access to higher education through reviewing their admission criteria, fees structures, development of infrastructure for distance education, and application of ICT in the teaching and learning. It is only increased enrolment that our institutions of higher education will be able to create a critical mass of trained and skilled human resources.

(b) Improved teaching and learning environment

The challenge here is to develop training programmes which enhance understanding of and search for workable solutions to the complex problems of poverty, like low incomes, low education, diseases, poor infrastructure, unemployment, political instability, civil conflicts and problems of governance.

(c) Relevance of higher education

Mr. President, irrelevant academic programmes offered by institutions of higher learning is an identified factor contributing to poverty in Africa. Implied here is the challenge for the Higher Learning Institutions to develop academic programmes that will produce graduates who, together with the institutions, are capable of advising policy makers on the design, implementation strategies and evaluation of specific poverty reducing interventions. Such interventions should focus on, among others, basic health and education, rural infrastructure, employment and income generation programmes, development of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) and conflict resolution which are relevant to the demands of our societies. Higher education institutions should carry out tracer studies, which will enable them to diversify their academic programmes to meet national market demands of skilled human resources for national development.

(d) Rapidly changing ICT

With regard to ICT the main challenge is for our institutions to narrow the *knowledge and digital* gaps between developed and developing countries, by struggling to keep pace with advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). A related challenge is for these institutions to search for ways of reducing the "*digital divide*" between rural and urban communities in their countries considering the fact that the ICT capacity in rural areas of Africa is almost non-existent.

(e) Development of centers of excellence

In pursuit of the challenges cited above, tertiary institutions in Africa need to develop centres of excellence in learning, and research and development (R&D). This is necessary for creating conditions for innovations, effective resource utilization and knowledge dissemination or transfer to lower/poorer segments of society.

(f) Globalization

The world has been reduced into one large village affected commonly by globalization. The challenge for the tertiary institutions is to be *flexible* enough to cope with the changing socio-economic conditions and factor

these into the design of new training and research programmes.

Universities in Africa need to re-think and restructure or even overhaul their education programmes to effectively empower them with capacity to innovate, adopt and adapt to the new environment in view of the fast globalising world.

(g) *Gender empowerment*

The gender disparity in institutions of higher education is a major problem that must urgently be address. The gender disparity seen in institutions of higher education is in terms of imbalance between male and female enrolments and preferential to certain academic programmes. In most of our institutions of higher education, there are fewer females enrolled in science based programmes than humanities. With the world being driven by science and technology, the potentials for contribution of females in national development should be developed through gender mainstreaming of academic programmes and equitable access to higher education.

(h) *Under funding*

It is a known fact that for years most of institutions of higher education in our countries have relied on Government funding for their operations. However, the flow of funds from the governments have in the recent years declined progressively rendering the institutions unable to realize their objectives. For the institutions to effectively participate in the fight against poverty, they should develop sustainable financial bases, improve costcutting measures and increase income generation activities and investment ventures. On the other hand, institutions must negotiate with Governments to adopt rational financial allocation to institutions e.g. by applying Student Unit Costs.

(i) *Brain drain*

Mr. President, another challenge is how to deal with brain drain which has denied higher learning institutions in Africa of its high calibre human resource - in which governments spent significant amount of public money which could have been spent on pro-poor programmes. However, African governments may be required to create a conducive working environment to retain their trained personnel.

6.0 Concluding Remarks

Mr. President and distinguished conference participants

Let me now conclude by stressing that education is important for development and poverty reduction. For it to be beneficial, tertiary education must pay attention to the quality of its programmes and its outputs. However, the programmes ought to give adequate emphasis to the immediate causes and effects of poverty in Africa. It must also instill a sense of confidence and preparedness to deal with any emerging challenges of globalization. In seeking for excellence, tertiary institutions need to strive to narrow the knowledge and digital gaps between developed and developed countries and to translate these achievements towards solving the problem of poverty in Africa. Expanded enrolments and equitable access to higher education by both male and female applicants, involvement of public and private sectors and delivery of relevant academic programmes to the market demands are central for national development.

Finally, Mr. President, let me pass the following issues for your consideration:

- (1) How can the Higher Education Sector in our countries be constructively engaged in order to attract foreign investments and technology in order to escape from poverty?
- (2) How can Higher Education prevent the marginalization of our economies in the face of the emerging and globalizing power of the new trans national aristocracy, the New world order (NOW) and the policies of the Supra national high clergy of the IMF and world Bank?
- (3) Scientific and Technological poverty is at the root of our poverty in Africa; can the Universities and our Research institutions do something to deliver us from this evil.
- (4) How can Higher Education prevent our economies from shipping toward the status of non viable national economies (NNEs) to borrow Oswalds de River's terminology?
- (5) Once again, I thank you Mr. President and distinguished Conference participants for your kind attention.

I wish you fruitful conference deliberations.

THANK YOU