

Annex 1

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ON THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SUB-REGIONAL EXPERTS WORKSHOP ON INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, 28TH JUNE – 1ST JULY 2004

Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to officially open this sub regional experts workshop on Indigenous Knowledge at the University of Nairobi.

I wish to extend a warm welcome to experts from Europe and North America and the represented African countries (Tanzania, Namibia and Mozambique) to Kenya. I also join the vice chancellor in welcoming you to university of Nairobi.

I understand that the Unesco/Uniwin chair, university of Nairobi has jointly organized this workshop in collaboration with the Kenya national commission for Unesco and the local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (links) project based in Paris, France.

Ladies and gentlemen, the aim of the workshop is to bring together leading experts from selected African countries to deliberate on the role of Indigenous Knowledge systems in sustainable human development. The areas being covered include:

1. Local and Indigenous Knowledge in water resource management and use.
2. Local Indigenous Knowledge in environmental conservation
3. Indigenous of education; and
4. Food security and traditional Knowledge

The outcome of this workshop will be an inventory of the critical concerns over Indigenous Knowledge in the continent. The concerns in question will enable the experts charge out mutually beneficial directions for both research and policy. I am sure that the two aspects of follow up will be undertaken hand-in hand so that research informs policy and vice-versa.

Ladies and gentlemen, Indigenous Knowledge is the systematic body of Knowledge acquired by the local people through accumulation of experiences, informal experimentation, and intimate understanding of their surroundings. This Knowledge represents the shared philosophies of communities, which may not agree with modern scientific Knowledge.

The acquisition of this Knowledge is mainly through unwritten and oral traditions. It is part and parcel of socialization mechanisms, with children beginning to learn at an early stage. Traditional education is indeed synonymous with Indigenous Knowledge, as it

was a form of education meant to develop functional members, who were adequately empowered to make judicial use of their environment for sustainable living.

Indigenous Knowledge is therefore local Knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. The local people are well aware of their own situations and well informed about their resources. They know what works and what doesn't work and the inter-connectivity between the different parts of their systems. It is also possible to explain in detail why certain things work or do not work. The Knowledge they possess is thus logical, time-tested and adaptive.

Ladies and gentlemen, contrary to allegations of static cultures, Indigenous Knowledge is dynamic. It changes over time through locally defined mechanisms of creativity and innovativeness. Furthermore, change is experienced through contracts with other local and international Knowledge systems.

Traditionally, processes such as trade, war, cross-cultural marriages and colonialism have enabled revision and redefinition of Indigenous Knowledge. These acculturation processes have in some cases served to enrich this Knowledge, while in other cases Indigenous Knowledge was completely undermined as primitive and evil. That most of this Knowledge has generally managed to exist in most communities in spite of these external pressures, underscores its enduring usefulness to these communities.

In fact only very rarely has Indigenous Knowledge been treated as systematic Knowledge *per se* and a useful ingredient to the mainstream development agenda. This undermining of Indigenous Knowledge led to people becoming more dependent on outside expertise, inefficient allocation of resources and manpower, and inappropriate planning strategies. The latter have not been in harmony with local philosophies, making them unsustainable.

Ladies and gentlemen, in recent times the above negative views and beliefs on Indigenous Knowledge have been countered by rapidly expanding database generated by biological and social scientists. This is a welcome development as a number of recent publications indicate that Indigenous Knowledge systems form the most viable basis for sustainable approaches to workable development strategies for the future. Indeed the so called participatory approach to community based activities cannot effectively take off if the wealth of Indigenous Knowledge held is not recognized and incorporated in the plans. New developments have in the last twenty years or so years begun to influence the attitudes of policy makers and planners to consider the role of this Knowledge in sustainable development.

In addition, regional and national Indigenous Knowledge resource centers have embarked on systematic recording of Indigenous Knowledge systems for use in development. There are three global centers in the United States of America and the Netherlands. In Africa, there are national Indigenous Knowledge centers located in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and south Africa.

Africa with its wide and diverse ethnic groups has a wealth of Indigenous Knowledge unmatched in many parts of the world. In spite of the existence of this Knowledge, research works and findings on Indigenous Knowledge have remained either fragmented and/or unpublished. Furthermore, the need to integrate this Knowledge into formal Knowledge systems has not been given the seriousness it deserves. Most of the commonly held Knowledge in the formal sector is based on modern science.

Time is therefore ripe for African scholars in Indigenous Knowledge to come together and take stock of the available wealth of this Knowledge, with a view of integrating it into the development process. The gaps in Indigenous Knowledge also need to be brought out.

One efficient way of achieving this goal is by providing an avenue for face-to-face deliberations among scholars and practitioners of Indigenous Knowledge. Such sharing should stimulate further research and dissemination, including follow up work with the specific communities, who are the custodians of this Knowledge. In this regard, participatory methodologies need to be employed when researching and disseminating Indigenous Knowledge.

Ladies and gentlemen, Indigenous Knowledge is a valuable resource, which is especially useful in resource conservation, management and sustainable development.

Modern Knowledge and science on resources and development portrays the question of environmental decay as calling for international institutional interventions, most of which are guided by non-Indigenous interests. Indigenous Knowledge is therefore a dissenting voice, which challenges the dominant discourse on environmental management and conservation.

It represents a dynamic tradition through which communities have managed to effectively co-exist with nature and preserve the environment. The benefits of this relationship are enormous. Indeed the fact that some multinational's today seek to hijack this Knowledge for their own profit underscores the value of Indigenous Knowledge. Of course this raises ethical questions of transmission, export, and patenting, which also need to be discussed.

I note that this regional workshop is one important step towards addressing the gains of Indigenous Knowledge. The challenge of the workshop is to be sensitive to the logic behind Knowledge, without seeking to unduly impose excessive scientific reasoning into the substance. A lot of thinking is needed where an interface is sought so that the holders of Indigenous and modern Knowledge are able to borrow from one another and also share the crossbreed.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is now my great pleasure to wish you fruitful deliberations and to declare this workshop officially open.

Thank you.