

## **JOSHUA MUKUSYA**

### **A TRIBUTE FOR HIS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Joshua Mukusya was a star at his home. He had to take on the large family at a very young age. Not many of us have the courage and determination to assume such responsibilities. Joshua also had the guts to talk to the relatives, neighbours and wazees as a very young family leader pointing out a truism of this continent- that the fate of the village depends on the villagers. He went further than talking. He convinced five families to begin to struggle with the sustainable development of the village. Once they were convinced, he had the persistence of organizing them and others to stay the cause. The village community ultimately anointed him as the village's supreme leader in sustainable development.**

**In initiating village sustainable development, he threatened not just the different factions in the village-characterized by the typical categories of the Alei and the Christians, thanks to the AIM/AIC traditions in Ukambani. After a while, local level officials of the state began attacking him. Among these were the formal Village Elders and the area Subchief. When they could not deter him, they appealed to the higher level of officialdom. The Chiefs, Agriculture and Water civil servants and the DOs got into Joshua Bashing. That was not all. A variety of KANU operatives ranging from its local youth leaders, MPs and even Ministers in charge of both Water and Agriculture also got into Joshua Bashing. People in these institutions used villagers, local elites, business people, teachers and professionals, not only to bash Joshua but also to deny the salience of his approach to sustainable development. After all, they argued, they were more educated and had more power.**

**Ultimately, after many years, DC Saisi started protecting Joshua for he was convinced that the development work was very relevant and useful to the Utooni community. It was therefore very satisfactory when in recent years some of us saw not only other DCs applauding his work but also senior national civil servants from the Ministry of Water acknowledging his work. We also saw how his organisation rejected a Minister's food money. It was distributed to groups to buy construction materials for Joshua's model of sustainable development is based on consuming what you sweat for. This idea is part of the Utooni inter-generational knowledge on ethics of sustainable development. What may not have been known by some of us, who witnessed this rejection of food money, was that it had a political motive-the Ukambani endless political wrangles. The source of the food money was in competition with the current local political leaders who have, at last, made peace with the Utooni model. That the rejection was automatic, without reference to Joshua, was, for me, very telling. The ethics of the act were transparent to all members of the Utooni system. We noted many shouting against the donation. The people assembled were not just from Utooni village but all the groups who work with Utooni from the wider Machakos County. They were in the meeting to evaluate one year's completed work and to plan for a new year's work.**

**I do not want to suggest that Utooni was only Joshua. Part of his genius was to train other leaders. Many of us do not remember that he created many committees to handle the development sectors, which Utooni Community identified as relevant. If one argues that village polytechnic was an old idea, look at the family planning, the member trading, the rejection of mathenge-Prosopis juliflora etc- by the afforestation committee, or the committee on drinking. It is these varied committees, which have produced the internal leaders. Joshua was not *THE LEADER* as is the Kenyan practice whether we look at KANU and other**

political parties, Government, NGOs, Churches and so on. He led the community to generate the leaders for whatever it needed. Some of us who were privileged to take part in the resolution of the attempted external take over of Utooni by an external NGO saw how firm other Utooni leaders handled the crisis. In typical analysis such leaders- uneducated old women-would not be typically seen as able to handle such.

Joshua's work in the rest of Kenya and internationally is magnificent. He was brutal in defending its quality. In 1999, in a national conference on sand dams at Machakos, water engineers, who claimed that his constructions were not technically solid, attacked him personally. He replied that the El Nino storm water, which washed away the Ngai Ndethya railway bridge, hit a dam, he had supervised and it did not break! Three points grow from this exchange. First, knowledge is not limited to some specialisations. Second, non-specialists have a place in sustainable development. Third, if others can only do personal attacks, stick to the facts. Joshua was the most brilliant star, a non-specialist gifted to do miracles in sustainable development.

Wherever Joshua went to build sand dams, he used the same Utooni model. He worked for very many organizations in other counties in Kenya and other countries to sell the two ideas intrinsic to his sustainable development work. These are water harvesting and improvement of the soil structure leading to improved farming, which trigger other improvements like incomes, health, education, business etc. This community based diagnosis and conception of alternative futures ignored totally the flim flam notions in international development thought since the seventies. For years the Utooni community worked on their sustainable development without external finances. If development financiers were not interested in supporting what Utooni needed, that was fine. Note also that some got credit for Utooni outcomes when they were only passers by. A notorious example is one UN agency, which showed Utooni as its contribution to international development in its 40 years of existence! It had contributed a decrepit pickup!

Utooni did not employ professionals for years. This put paid to notion that communities can develop on their own initiative. It also showed the bankruptcy of extension services. Professionals have only been added recently as the activities and coverage complexified.

On a personal note, it was Joshua who was the SASOL consultant when we started sand dams in Kitui. We sought his knowledge and that of the Utooni village, not just in terms of the science of building sand dams but also for organizing communities. Our first sand dam communities were trained by the Utooni community. They lived with Utooni Members and were not just taught about construction but also how to farm and how to deal with community issues like drinking, the barrier between the church people and those who belonged to traditional religion etc. Personally, I am very grateful to Joshua and the Utooni community for what they were doing we did not find either in development theory or in community organizing studies. Their experience contributed immeasurably to our work.

We in SASOL honour this great Kenyan and his community. We extend the honours to all the communities in Kenya and the rest of Africa who followed his creative and humane *Nyayos* to begin their sustainable development. The best memorial to Joshua is for all of us, who were touched by him, to continue the sustainable development work along the lines he showed us. Towards that end, we need to respect the varied communities we work with. We need to create leadership, which has no *minainas* to the impunity of the elites, politicians and

the state. We need to generate communities who are tolerant of all. We need to take politics out of sustainable development particularly at the national levels. We need to take sustainable development out of the flim flam of international development discourses. In summary we need to anchor development at the community level!

I am aware that many people have nominated Joshua and Utooni for all sorts of local and global prizes. This is testament to his creativity on sustainable development. That Kenya has not recognized and honoured him is a sad comment on our country, which needs millions of Joshuas. That many individuals and organizations in and outside this country recognize him is not only fitting but also glorious!

It is my prayer that Kenya's future generations will recognize and give the highest honours to this very creative Kenyan.

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**“SAWUBONA” - “I SEE YOU.”**

**SILU functioned as a leader and change agent in his home community.**

**“SAWUBONA” - “I SEE YOU.”**

**SILU mobilized the elements of community: strength, water, and soil into life-enhancing infrastructure and relationships.**

**“SAWUBONA” - “I SEE YOU.”**

**SILU, in a lifetime of work, drew attention to Ukambani as an innovative ‘centre of the world’.**

**“SAWUBONA” - “I SEE YOU.”**

**SILU identified and mobilized ‘development’ in a manner that enlarged and enhanced [rather than**

**diminished] the respective resources of water, soil and community.**

**“SAWUBONA” - “I SEE YOU.”**

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