

Annex 2

SPEECH BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI ON THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SUB-REGIONAL EXPERTS WORKSHOP ON INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, 28TH JUNE – 1ST JULY 2004

The Minister for Education, Science and Technology
Kenya's Permanent Representative to the United Nations
Officials from UNESCO Nairobi Office
Kenya National Commission for UNESCO
Fellow scholars and experts
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I warmly welcome you to the University of Nairobi on this important workshop on Indigenous knowledge. I am especially grateful to our colleagues from the sub-region, who have been consistent in their interest in this workshop since mid-last year. The workshop was initially planned for September 2003, but was postponed due to unavoidable circumstances.

Mr. Minister, the University of Nairobi is grateful to the UNESCO Paris programme on Local and Indigenous Knowledge (LINKS) for supporting this workshop. The workshop brings together experts and practitioners of indigenous knowledge to share knowledge and experiences in this field with a view to setting the agenda for research and dissemination. I am aware that the topics being discussed include: environmental conservation, education, farming systems, food security, water systems and health. All these are pertinent to the national development processes of the represented countries.

Mr. Minister, this workshop has been organized under the auspices of the UNESCO/UNITWIN Chair at the University of Nairobi, whose mandate includes working with communities with a view to promoting sustainable development. This initiative together with other University of Nairobi outreach programs aim to nurture the University of Nairobi into a tower of hope and strength.

Over the years, the UNESCO Chair has worked with communities in the areas of health, education of girls, environmental conservation, water development, support to adolescents and livelihood interventions. This work has been community based and community responsive.

It is notable that like many institutions in Africa, little or no attention has been given to the role of indigenous knowledge. Bits of research and documentation exist, but coordination is lacking on the best practices and how the knowledge in question can guide a concerted agenda for development.

It is in this regard that this workshop is being held so as to bring together leading experts from selected African countries to deliberate on the role of indigenous knowledge systems in sustainable human development.

As an institution of higher learning charged with the responsibility of undertaking research, teaching and dissemination, the University of Nairobi is very supportive of what will be deliberated upon and the follow up action. Our commitment has already been demonstrated through related programmes such as the UNESCO Chair, Extra-Mural studies, and community work by students and staff.

We shall continue to support strategic linkages between communities and the University, as this will undoubtedly enhance the sharing of knowledge for mutual benefit.

Mr. Minister, the university is conscious that for a long time, the pursuit of scientific knowledge has tended to ignore indigenous knowledge. We however recognize that communities have a stock of knowledge, which they can offer to the knowledge industry. Indeed, when indigenous knowledge is weaved together with scientific research, the mix will serve to facilitate more sustainable development programmes.

Mr. Minister, this sub-regional workshop is an important step in this direction. The experts are going to present papers and deliberate on the core areas, uses and challenges faced in understanding and dealing with indigenous knowledge. I am sure that the issues outlined in the programme will be well covered and that the follow up will bear immense fruits for all the countries represented here.

On behalf of the University of Nairobi, I take this opportunity to wish all participants an enjoyable stay in the university and the city of Nairobi. I am happy to note that you will get a chance to go for a field trip and appreciate life in rural Kenya and see for yourselves some of the linkages that the University of Nairobi continues to maintain with local communities. I assure you that this visit will be an eye-opener and it will augment the issues covered during this workshop.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and a sustained follow up.

With those few remarks, it is now my great pleasure and duty to invite the Minister for Education, Science and Technology to officially open this workshop.

Welcome Mr. Minister.