

# FORESTRY RESEARCH IN SADC COUNTRIES: AN EXPERIENCE FROM SUA ALUMNUS

*An address to the 20th Convocation Luncheon of SUA by Honourable Dr. James Wanyancha*

*SUA Alumni and Member of Parliament for Serengeti Constituency, Tanzania*

Mr. President, on receiving your invitation letter requesting me to be the guest speaker at the 2004 SUA Convocation Luncheon, I was thrilled and couldn't believe my eyes because the invitation amounted to my homecoming.

Mr. President, let me say at the outset that when I graduated in BSc. In Forestry in 1977 from the University of Dar es Salaam's Morogoro campus Faculty of Agriculture that became Sokoine University of Agriculture (SUA) in 1984 it never occurred to me that one day I would be honoured by this very institution of higher learning and be invited as a guest speaker.

Once again, I thank you Mr. President, members of the academic staff and students who have gathered at this luncheon for the honour and privilege you have bestowed on me today.

Mr. President, I was an undergraduate student here between 1974 and 1977 the then University of Dar es Salaam, Morogoro Campus, which had only one faculty: the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Science. But todate SUA is a fully-fledged University created in 1984, and it is one of the most reputed Universities in Africa and the world at large, covering disciplines of Agriculture and related fields. The spreading of SUA wings to a range of disciplines could only be attributed to efforts made by your committed academic staff as well as students.

**Mr. President,** I have been following closely the performance of SUA and let me tell you that SUA graduates have been performing wonders in many African countries such as Botswana, Swaziland Lesotho, and South Africa etc. In fact they have also been performing excellently in other parts of the world, such as the United States of America, Europe, Canada etc.

This is not a mean achievement, **Mr. President.** I therefore commend you for this sterling performance and encourage you to keep on the good work you are doing.

But, I would like to caution the SUA academic staff and students not to be intoxicated by the achievements made so far. You should instead work harder to ensure that this University continues to produce outstanding scholars who would play a major role towards not only the development of the African continent but also the whole world. SUA graduates pursuing further studies abroad should always be distinguished for their academic excellence.

**Mr. President,** I also take this opportunity to congratulate and encourage students who are expected to graduate tomorrow. They should have accepted the fact that their graduation is not the end of their studies but it is the beginning of a long journey to high academic credentials. My advice to them is that in order to be successful in life they should work hard, be trustworthy and also have good public relations with their workmates and the public in general.

**Mr. President,** with hard work nothing is impossible under the sun. Let me tell you a short but successful story of an African American neurosurgeon, Dr. Ben Carson, whose journey to success began, from poverty, violence and ignorance, but culminated in the directorship of pediatric neurosurgery at John Hopkins Hospital in the United States.

Dr. Carson began life poor, and was considered stupid by most of his acquaintances. Do you know the secret behind his success?

He says in his book titled THINK BIG – that you as an individual, and only you, are responsible for your life. With a positive attitude and hard work, you can overcome any challenge and accomplish any goal. He says one must read. Read books. That's how to get someplace in life.

**Mr. President,** as your guest speaker to this special luncheon I am not intending to spoil the delicious food which is about to be served by becoming a lecturer but let me briefly outline my background history as you requested me to do.

**Mr. President,** as you know I was born on Christmas day, December 25th 1952 in Tarime town, Mara Region, to a prison officer who was the son of Chief Mnanka of Butimbaru in North Mara and a housewife mother called Coleta Wanyanacha. I am the fourth of 11 children. At the age of five my father died, and since my mother could not support the whole family of 11 children my grandfather took me over. During my stay with my grandfather my main occupation was herding cattle, a job that my grandfather conceded that I always performed excellently.

**Mr. President,** One day, when I was nine years old, the Ward Executive Officer at my native village asked me whether I was going to school and I told him point-blank that I was not. I told him that I was not going to school because there was nobody to take me there, following my father's death. Immediately, the Ward Executive Officer went to my grandfather and ordered him that I should be sent to school without failure. I was at that moment that I went to stay with my grandmother and started going to school. Today, as an Alma mater of this institution of academic excellence I am proud to say that it was my grandmother who shaped my life to where I am. She always told me to be bold in whatever I did and to study hard saying education was the key to better life.

**Mr. President,** I took my grandmother's advice as a challenge, which indeed paid off after I had resolved to study hard with only one mission at the back of my mind: to assist my poor family kin future. I therefore went to Remagwe Primary School in March 1961 when, I believe, most of the students gathered here today were not yet born, and in 1964 I

completed Standard IV and proceeded to Mugeta Primary School for Standards V and VI from 1965 to 1966; and in 1967 I moved to Kibumay Seminary School to complete Standard VII. After passing my primary school examinations I joined Ikizu Seminary School in 1968 where I completed for IV in 1971. I performed brilliantly in science subjects and I was selected to join Mazengo Secondary School where I majored in Physics, Chemistry and Biology (PCB). I completed Form VI in 1973.

**Mr. President,** our A level class at Mazengo had 22 students and all of us passed with flying colours and joined the University of Dar es Salaam where the majority did their BSc. Degree courses in medicine and veterinary Science. I did not go for medicine because my friend-a forestry officer holding a Diploma in Forestry-advised me to study for a forestry degree where he said the future was bright. He told me that with a BSc. In Forestry it would be easy for me to acquire high positions within a short time after completing my BSc.

**Mr. President,** despite the fact that I had not seen any forestry plantation in my life I picked forestry as my first choice, and I studied forestry between 1974 and 1977 at the University of Dar es Salaam's Faculty of Agriculture in the Department of Forestry based here at SUA. My intake was the second admission at the Faculty of Agriculture at that time.

**Mr. President,** let me admit today that the 22 students in our BSc. Forestry class were to say the least very brilliant and testimony to this is the fact that our class has so far produced nine PhDs. And five of them have taught at SUA. For the sake of Transparency, my classmates who have taught at SUA For the sake of Transparency, my classmates who have taught at SUA are Prof. Aku O,kiting'ati, Prof. Ole-Meiludie, Prof. Iddi, Prof. Mugasha and Prof. S.A.O. Chamshama. I don't want to be seen singing a praise song for my classmates but deeds speak louder than words. Three of my classmates were Deans of the SUA Faculty of Forestry and the current Director of Forestry and Beekeeping, Prof. Said Iddi, and his assistant, Mr. Isaya Mwang'one, are also a product of our class of 1977. However, my history with SUA did not end up after I had completed my studies because I came back as a Board Member of the Faculty of Forestry for three years beginning 1987. I also served as an external examiner at SUA for undergraduate Forest Biology subjects from 1995 to 1997. Today I can comfortably boast that SUA is in my blood and is my second home.

**Mr. President,** in your letter of invitation you indicated your interest to hear from the horse's mouth about my intellectual experiences and achievements that I have made so far in my life well and good.

After I had graduated at SUA I was employed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism as a Seed and Nurseries Research Officers between 1977 and 1980 where my task included conducting research on seed and nurseries and co-coordinating conducting research on seed collection and handling activities through the country. But I had to cut short my employment in 1978 in order to pursue a Masters Degree Course in Forest Genetics at the University of Wales in the UK where I graduated in December 1980. I

came back home briefly and in 1982 I joined the University of New Brunswick in Canada where I got my PhD in Forest Genetics in 1986. While at the University of New Brunswick I assisted in teaching forest genetics and establishing and taking care of forest genetics experiments.

Today, I have all reasons to wear broad smiles as my fields of competence range from biodiversity conservation, environment protection, natural resources management, tree improvement, community forestry, and now, to politics.

When I returned home in 1987 I joined the Tanzania Forestry Research Institute (TAFORI) as a Tree Breeder and Coordinator of Silviculture Research from November 1986 to November 1988. My work involved planning, establishing and assessing species, provenances and progenies trials in the country and analyzing and publishing tree improvement research results.

Lack of research funds at TAFORI forced me to resign and I decided to look for a place where I could utilize my knowledge effectively, and my first venture was in Zimbabwe where I was employed by the country's Forestry Commission as in-charge of tree breeding from 1988 to 1991. My duties involved designing and supervising the establishment of seed orchards and breeding seedling orchards, and conducting research into the design, siting, spacing and management of clonal and seedling orchards.

Between November 1991 and April 1994, I joined the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Plant Genetic Resources Centre in the Zambian capital of Lusaka where I was Senior Conservation Officer and my main duties were to coordinate biodiversity conservation activities in 10 SADC member states.

I moved to Maseru in Lesotho where I worked for the SADC Tree Seed Centre Project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) between May 1994 and April 1997. Here I was employed as a Technical Advisor to the project. My responsibility included, managing the Regional Office South on behalf of the SADC Tree Seed Centre Project, providing management and technical assistance to Lesotho and Botswana National Tree Seed Centres with particular emphasis on attaining sustainable tree seed programme. I also provided technical advice on tree improvement on Tree Seed Centres in the SADC Member States.

**Mr. President,** after my stint in the three southern African countries I decided to return home and got employed by Africare Tanzania from 1998 to 2000 as Manager of the Ugalla Community Based Conservation Project. My responsibilities included, overseeing all project activities, planning and implementing all project activities, and assisting local communities in establishing Wildlife Management Areas and Joint Forest Regimes.

**Mr. President,** During my professional career I have authored and co-authored 25 scientific publications such as, Genetic Variation in Nitrogen Concentration, Accumulations and Utilization Efficiency in *Larix Laricina* Families, Review of Softwoods Tree Breeding in Zimbabwe, Provenance Productivity of *Pinus Maximinoi* in

the Southern Africa, Genetic Variation in *Faidherbia Albida* and its Agroforestry Potential in Zimbabwe etc.

**Mr. President,** In 2004 I decided to engage myself in politics, despite the saying that politics is a dirty game. My interests in politics were inculcated into me by my grandmother. When I was young my grandmother Counseled me to restore our clan's chieftdom by becoming a leader one day. My grandmother sensed the talent that I had to qualify me to enter into politics but the going at the beginning was rough and tough since my background was that of science subjects. I resolved to make true my grandmother's dream of seeing me one day becoming a leader by vying for a parliamentary seat for my Serengeti constituency during the October 2000 parliamentary elections. I decide to get myself into politics after 23 years of professional experience, something that was not easy.

Also, the elderly and people from all walks of life in my constituency urged me to vie for the seat saying I was the right person who could deliver the goods and services for the benefit of the electorate. When I was elected as a Member of Parliament I accepted the Challenge and I told myself to go ahead since people had high expectations from me. I realized that it was not going to be possible to fulfill all their expectations for one importnt reason i.e. a razor-thin budget allocated by the government. However, I came to realize that with the meager resources we are getting from the government, we can perform wonders in economic development provided that there is transparency in the way we use the scarce resources.

**Mr. President,** During my more than four years stint as Member of Parliament I have also come to realize hat getting your priorities done according to people's wish is very important. My priorities during my tenure have been improvement of water services, education roads, health care and electricity. These are priorities, which we found that would bring economic development among our people during my tenure. We have been able to have success through government funding and project proposals.

I have also made write-ups that have resulted in getting aid such as ambulances, construction of dams and construction of hostels for schoolgirls in my constituency.

**Mr. President,** I humbly believe that my sound academic qualifications have also enabled me to make valuable contributions during debates on Bills and national budgets that are very crucial. Basing on my experience as a legislator, I advise educated people not to shy away from politics. If they think that by doing so they will be able to make significant contribution to communities and the nation as well.

**Mr. President,** let me give some advice to the young as well as the old ones as you requested me to do. We must all realize that we are in a globalised world where the world has become a global village. The type of education offered by this University should enable the students to market themselves within and outside Tanzania because under globalization they are likely to face stiff competition in almost all disciplines, including the job market. The education that students are getting at SUA should help them enter the

job market with confidence. SA students should ensure themselves that they are marketable within and outside Tanzania, before we resort to complaining that the ground for globalisation is not level.

At BSc degree level students should have a broad knowledge in agriculture that will enable them to secure jobs in any field of agriculture while specialization should be done at MSc. Or PhD degree levels.

**Mr. President,** it is also important to note that traditionally, the education that is offered by most of Universities in Tanzania has been geared at enabling students to do desk jobs, which is an old way of thinking. We should ask ourselves a few questions such as why is it that our professionals like agriculturists don't start large-scale farming? Why can't our veterinarians have ranches? The problem is that our students lack entrepreneurship skills. There is therefore need to review our curricula in our institutions of higher learning in order to add entrepreneurship skills as part of the curricula. Graduates in South Africa and Europe undertake such projects upon completion of their studies, and let me assure you that such projects are more profitable than the white-collar jobs. In other words, the education that the students get from our Universities should not confine them to looking for jobs in the country; it should be used as a bridge for venturing outside the country. In the changing global landscape, we must encourage our graduates not be only job-seekers, but in the majority of cases they should be job-creators.

**Mr. President,** in recent years, there has been a tendency where institutions of higher learning do not give students adequate time for field practical work on the pretext that there is a shortage of funds. This trend should be reversed because theories alone will never serve the purpose of education that one gets in such institutions. In the most ridiculous situation, I have heard of alternatives of incorporating what is called theoretical practical. This will not produce the practically oriented graduates that we need to move this nation forward.

**Mr. President,** in recent years, including this year, we have witnessed incidences of leakage of examinations in some parts of the country. The thorny issue of examination leakage is now becoming a cancer that is eating the fabric of our society. The academic staff and students should be aware that forged or stolen examinations would only help to erode our academic goals. We must be discouraged from looking for leaked examinations and we should always aim for excellence in education.

**Mr. President,** Forgery in examinations is simply discovered by the non-performance of graduates at places of work when they get employed. And with forged examinations one cannot be expected to compete in the globalised world – period.

I think it is high time that Universities became strict by terminating both members of the teaching staff as well as students found involving themselves in forged examinations or certificates lest we created a nation of semi-illiterates. Indeed, the type of education offered by our institutions of higher learning, including SUA, and the type of academic staff that we employ will determine our national destiny. On the other side of the

academic coin, talented students should be retained at SUA at any cost. They must be given educational incentives such as scholarships. Intellectuals should be identified at an early stage and be helped. And I understand that most of the outstanding professors sitting here today were retained by SUA upon completion of their BSc. Degrees.

**Mr. President,** on the other hand, I think it is high time that the promotion of the academic staff should not necessarily be based on the number of scientific publications that one has published. Nobel Prizes are not necessarily won by writing a lot of papers but the Nobel Prizes are won after one has made important scientific discovery. For example, I don't see why somebody who discovered the mobile phone should not be promoted to professorship simply because he didn't have the required number of publications. Scientists all over the world are now working round the clock trying to discover the cure for the dreaded HIV/AIDS, and it is no wonder that the one who will discover the AIDS cure will be awarded the Nobel Prize. My advice is that academic staff should not necessarily be required to write many papers on a wide field for the sake of promotion. But they should be encouraged to focus their research work on a narrow specialized field and be able to make great scientific discovery that will be used to contribute significantly to our industrial revolution, after achieving this one should be promoted immediately.

**Mr. President,** in order to fortify our academic excellence in our universities we should discourage the tendency of electing deans or heads of departments. Such posts should be earned by advertising in the media and candidates be subjected to interviews by panels of experts. A searching committee of outstanding academic scholars within and outside SUA should scrutinize the candidates for the posts.

High learning institutions like SUA need Deans who are able to make bold decisions without fearing for failing to meet the expectation of the people who have long term-focused ideas on how to make this university continue to produce outstanding scholars in the future. You should not shy away from doing this, because this is a normal practice used by most of the universities all over the world. Elections should be left to politicians like me!

**Mr. President, *I thank you for your kind attention.***