

Transcript of the Speech by President Kikwete of Tanzania at the Inaugural Annual African Union and AED African Presidential Lecture, September 17, 2007.

President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete:

I should thank my host, Riviana Menia [spelled phonetically] and Jack. And thank all Excellencies and ladies and gentlemen present here. I'm sincerely grateful to the — for the opportunity to be associated with this historic inaugural African Union and Academy for Educational Development Annual African Presidential Lecture. I thank our hosts, the African Union Mission to the United States and the Academy for Educational Development, for inviting me. I have been asked to talk about anything.

[laughter]

And I've chosen to talk about the role of international NGOs in the civil society in Africa's development challenges. We in Tanzania—and indeed across the African continent—consider international civil society and NGOs to be important partners in our development endeavors. They are also important in our efforts to improve governance, to protect the environment, and generally, to respond to the needs and wishes and priorities of our people.

I feel privileged, indeed, to be given the opportunity to speak to such a distinguished audience that brings together diplomats — and I see a number of them, many of them here that I know, because I have been in the Foreign Service for about ten years, so I've met many of the people in the diplomatic service — many government officials — I see a number of U.S. government officials here that I know — members of the African Civil Society and NGOs. It is here that we can share ideas and experiences, as well as carry forward discussions on the challenges that Africa faces and the best way to work together in addressing or redressing it.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I received the invitation to address this august audience with mixed feelings, mixed ideas, on how to approach this subject matter. I had to think long and hard to find a way to highlight the challenges that we face in Africa today, and package them in a delivery that would not last more than half an hour. These are the instructions or the orders that I got. You, in this room, and I are not strangers to the challenges that Africa faces. The challenges are too many, too complex, and persist. And pessimists, and some pessimists, may say too intractable.

So eventually, in the interest of brevity and comprehensiveness, I decided to group Africa's challenges into four clusters. The first one is the challenges of exclusion and irrelevance. The second: the challenges of exploitation. The third: the challenges of governance. And the fourth: the challenges of sustainability. Perhaps some of you had expected that I would focus today on things that we hear most in international media, such as poverty, corruption, HIV/AIDS, conflicts, and the like. I'm sure you have heard enough of that, and some of you are more knowledgeable than me on some of them, if not all of them.

The truth, however, is that to a large extent, problems such as these, that capture international interest, are symptomatic of an underlying crisis of growth. There is no doubt that Africa is rich in natural resources, and the resilience of its people. Why Africa's opportunity for growth has not been fully utilized or produced the results we all want to see is really the fundamental question to ask. We all know that there are formidable obstacles to growth in the continent that need wider and objective discussions. They need to be identified. They need to be — we need to address the structural issues nationally, regionally, and globally.

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, poverty is a major problem in Africa, if not the central issue. But today, I'm going to talk more about the challenges of exclusion and the threats of irrelevance, both of which systemically undermine Africa's efforts and capacity to win the war on poverty. My plea to you then, would be to work with us to address this challenge, and stem the tides threatening to push us to the shores of irrelevance on account of insignificance.

As I see it, there are five drivers of economic growth, enhancing capacity to fight poverty. These are education, technology, capital, trade, and research and development. Let us first discuss education. And I begin with a challenge of exclusion in education deliberately, because we are meeting at the Academy of Educational Development, an organization that has done so much and which continues to do so much for education in Africa and elsewhere. But it is also because — it is also true that without greater and faster progress in education, growth and development, and with it, poverty eradication, will remain a distant dream in Africa.

Tanzania's founding president, Julius Nyerere, used to say "Education is the key to life." And President Nelson Mandela, the founding president of post-apartheid South Africa added, "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world." Yet in all levels of education, from basic to higher education, matriculation in Africa is the lowest in the world. President George Bush's \$600 million, multi-year Africa Education Initiative that focuses on increasing access to quality basic education is gratefully welcome. But alone it is not sufficient to redress historical legacies and imbalances and fully address the challenges of Africa's exclusion from the liberating influence of education.

Now, the driver of growth tied to education is technology. Looking at the average — at the huge development gap between what was still called the third world and the first world, Julius Nyerere could find no better advice for us than to say "You must run while the others walk." It makes sense, this prosperity gap between Africa and the developed world can only narrow if Africa runs faster than the developed world. But there is no way Africa can keep pace, let alone run faster, with the developed world, if the present technological gap between the two sides persists.

Most of us in the African continent do not want technology to fly into space or to make sophisticated weapons systems. We only want to access to leverage technology for survival, for growth, and for development. We need to, and must access and leverage technology that would see our children, all our children, both boys and girls, access quality education at affordable cost, technology that would ensure that our people are not dying or being deliberated — debilitated by diseases the rest of the world have forgotten already, technology that would

ensure that our farmers are not at the mercy of the vagaries of weather, technology that would improve governance and public safety, technology that would enhance efficiency in government and business, technology that would address supply-side constraints to facilitate our meaningful participation in regional and global trade.

And the driver of economic growth and development is capital, especially investment and risk capital, and the various financial instruments that can be brought to bear on the entrepreneurship of our people. It is not that African peoples are less entrepreneurs or risk-takers than the rest of the people in the world. But the exclusion from global capital markets, and the inadequacies of financial instruments that can leverage, as well as protect their participation and investment in trade, remains a huge stumbling block.

The fourth driver of economic growth is trade. The continued marginalization of Africa in global trade, especially when we remove destructive industries from the question, is a matter of great concern to us. To develop in dignity, to be able to wean ourselves from aid-dependency, Africa must trade itself out of poverty. We must, therefore, insist on a fairer globalization and a speedy conclusion of the Doha round of trade negotiations. And it is to be a truly development round, which means the outcome must be facilitative to Africa's development, not obstructive. It is sad that when Africa insists on the round being conducive to the continent's development. We are the ones who are being perceived as being obstructive.

The fifth driver of growth and development — before that, you know, when our team was going to the Doha discussions and the subsequent discussions, the instructions I gave them is, “Better have no argument than have a bad argument.” So if you get to a point where you think the argument is bad, simply say “No,” and come back. There is no point in getting into an argument that benefits the others, and we are only the losers in that equation.

The fifth driver of growth and development, especially in Africa, if Africa wants to run while others walk, is investment in research and development. But when one's mind is focused on issues of survival, as the majority of people in Africa are, it would appear unreasonable to expect them to direct scarce resources towards research and development.

Two areas of research and development are, however, key to Africa's sustainable development. The first is research and development that deliberately focuses on the best way Africa can turn its abundant natural resources—its climate, its culture, and its heritage, and its indigenous knowledge—into an asset for development. The second is the R and D that specifically focuses on increasing efficiency and productivity through appropriate technology.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the second group of development challenges facing Africa is that of exploitation, however unfashionable the term may seem today. Over 30 years ago, Walter Rodney wrote a book called, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. It is true things are more complicated than that. But one does not need to agree with all he said in the book to concede that there are serious structure impediments to Africa's growth, and that the unfair process and structure of globalization internationally, intentionally or unintentionally, leads to the exploitation of Africa.

Take infrastructure, for example. To a large extent, African commerce still relies on infrastructure built during colonial era, and such infrastructure had two main purposes. First: to facilitate the extraction of natural resources, and export raw materials to fuel European industrialization. Secondly: to facilitate the export of European manufactured goods to Africa for those in Africa who could afford them. Today, with little variation, Africa's infrastructure serves the same purpose, even though now some of the commerce moves in an east to west direction as well.

The point is that Africa's infrastructure, as it stands today, is not very helpful in addressing the exploitative nature of the trade between Africa and the rest of the world. Africa has to trade more with itself and build a manufacturing base to serve the needs of Africa, and create skilled jobs. But this will need heavy investment infrastructure to create viable and— to create viable and efficient national and regional markets. It is for this reason that all projects we are negotiating in the MCA Compact we have negotiated is—are related to infrastructure development.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen — and also it is because of this that infrastructure development is the center of all NEPAD programs. As long as Africa's natural resources are being processed abroad, as long as value addition for our minerals, natural resources like oil, timber, and agricultural commodities is done outside the continent, the people of Africa will not derive the benefits they should get from their natural wealth.

It is true, and I have no doubt in my mind, that Africa is not getting a fair share of the proceeds from its natural resources and agricultural commodities. We must seriously begin to think of ways to establish Africa's processing and value addition capacities for our oil, for our gas, for our cocoa, for our coffee, cotton, cashew nuts, and our other agricultural products, so that we can make the best use of [unintelligible]. It is not exploitation — is it not exploitation that the coffee farmer from Tanzania is paid about 40 U.S. cents for one pound, and that one pound can make many cups of coffee selling at four dollars at a coffee joint in Washington? The greatest exploitation is that of African labor. A worker packing chocolates in Switzerland earns hundreds of times more than the farmer in Ghana, who is doing the backbreaking job of producing the coffee, without which we cannot get the fine Swiss chocolate.

Fair trade incorporates social responsibility, as some of the ways to mitigate effects of such an exploitative system. I thank the civil society and the NGOs for their great work in this area, but more needs to be done, and more benefits need to accrue to the African farmers. Poverty can never be eradicated in Africa unless the African farmers, who constitute over 70 percent of the labor force, earn a fair share of their produce and fair compensation for their labor.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the third group of challenges for Africa relates to sustainability. Economic growth in Africa has been impressive, averaging 5.4 percent over the last three years. Last year, African economies maintained this growth momentum, recording an overall GDP growth of 5.7 percent. But we all know that this growth is underpinned by a buoyant commodity market, especially with regards to crude oil, gas, and minerals. But we have to think beyond this situation, and ask ourselves if Africa is using this opportunity to diversify its economy so as to ensure growth is sustained, even without the current bullish

market from commodities. The current growth trajectory is too dependent on this buoyant commodities market, and this has serious implications for such sustainability.

Another sustainability challenge relates to the environment. We have an almost unanimous scientific conclusion about the threat of global warming and climate change. As I said before, at least 70 percent of Africans depend on agriculture for their livelihood. For us, climate change threatens to deepen poverty and increase misery. Scarce water resources, scarce food supplies, will drastically affect us.

Likewise, despite all the hype about biofuels, we have to be careful about the impact of massive investments in this area. While we welcome investments in biofuels, we remain — we should remain conscious of the fact that by their nature, biofuels will require very large tracts of land, which will either come from diverting land use from food production to biofuel crops, or encroaching upon forest reserves and water cache materials. The rising cost of some food crops such as corn could also price food out of reach to many poor Africans. Biofuels hold great promise, but we have more questions, and we have got to be careful about sustainability, or rather, we have to ascertain sustainability.

Ladies and gentlemen, the final challenge I should like to talk about is one of governance in its broad sense. It is easy to criticize African governance issues and on poverty, but the real question we have to ask is whether African institutions have the capacity and the human resources to reach the levels of performance we want them to be. To me, the governance challenge in Africa is not about political will. The end of the Cold War was focused — has focused African minds, including those of its leaders, internally. Initiatives such as NEPAD and the African Peer Review Mechanisms — Mechanism, would not have been possible during the Cold War. The general political will to improve governance is evident, but support to build the capacity of institutions, in terms of experience and resources, both financial and human, is still not up to speed.

Brain drain is sometimes held responsible for low capacity levels in African governance and social service delivery. If you ask me, the best way to deal with brain drain Africa is not to proscribe it, even if that were possible, or to forcefully repatriate Africans in the diaspora. That may also be impossible. We have, instead, to find a way to tap into their education and experience for the development of their motherland, without having to relocate completely to Africa.

Brain drain is symptomatic of a global challenge of skilled labor in certain professions, although it is also true that some educated Africans in rich countries end up doing menial jobs far removed from their professional training. I was in one European country recently, or a few months ago. A Tanzanian engineer is a truck driver. [laughs] You can see the kind of work this man is doing. He's an engineer and he's a truck driver.

If rich countries need African doctors and nurses, the least they could do is to help us train more in order to narrow the global deficit in healthcare providers and workers. Help us. We'll train more doctors so that we have more to share. Don't take the few that we have trained from our meager sources.

[applause]

But fewer and fewer developed countries are investing in higher education in Africa, and even the number of graduate and postgraduate scholarships they provide to Africa is declining. It is difficult for African students to get admission in academic institutions in the developed world. The process of getting a visa—even if your parents have been able to pay for all the school fees in a U.S. university—is a big hassle. You may end up not getting a visa.

[applause]

You may end up not getting the visa. So we train the doctor, they take him away.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are also deficits in global democratic governance that need to be addressed. There is mounting concern that some of the key institutions of global governance are neither democratic nor responsive and accountable to their wider global membership. This puts Africa at a huge disadvantage, as it seeks redress for what we consider to be an unfair globalization, both in economic, social, and cultural terms.

But within Africa, we have to continue improving good democratic governance in both political and economic terms, while also addressing the remaining conflict situations in the continent. Peace and security have to remain high on the agenda of the African Union and of regional economic groupings. Likewise, we have to accelerate the desire to create viable and mutually beneficial regional and economic groupings that would ultimately be the building blocks to our African economic community, and subsequently, to the United States of Africa. I do not have to tell you that the United States of America is a huge inspiration for us as we try to create the United States of Africa.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, before I tell you what I think the role of the international civil society and NGOs should be in support of our efforts to address these formidable challenges, I want to once again thank you and other civil society and NGOs community for what you have done and continue to do in Africa. Tanzania is a beneficiary of your support, which, among other things, contributes to my country's receiving debt cancellation, thereby releasing resources for large investments in poverty-reduction endeavors, including health, education, the fight against HIV/AIDS, and increased rural roads. Your active participation in other areas of interest, such as education, health, and human rights — human rights, as well as environment and others, are highly appreciated by all of us.

But looking forward, I should ask that in addition to what you are doing, you should also focus on the following areas. First, work hard to build a strategic constituency for African issues in Washington, DC, and elsewhere in this great country, and the important capitals of the world.

Second, ensure African issues become part of the local and national politics. I am a politician, and I know that if a significant number of voters demand action on an issue, I had better listen if I want to be reelected. Likewise, if we want African issues to capture the interest of political leaders in this country and in the developed countries, they should be made part of the domestic

political agenda. This, I believe, is something the civil society and NGOs can help us with. I know it's not easy, but we've got to continue, because if the African development agenda is not part of the political agenda of the political leadership in the developed countries, it's so difficult to make headway.

Third, I ask — I also ask you to keep up the spirit of solidarity with African peoples, and to spread the good news about the transformation occurring or taking place across the continent. Some of the things we need to transform — to do to transform are far-reaching and can only be undertaken if we stand together. There is so much that has happened in the continent, but not much is being said. The NGOs and international civil society organizations, everywhere in the continent, help us tell the story. If you don't, it will always be Darfur, Somalia, as if that is what is representative of Africa.

[applause]

My fourth request to you is reach out and help where you can, to address the challenges I have outlined today. Let us push for a truer development round of global trade. In the meantime, let us strengthen the constituency for fair trade, for aid, and for debt relief for those African countries that are yet to benefit or qualify.

Five, help to build the capacity, not only of governments in Africa, but also of the local NGOs and the civil societies. They need your assistance. So at times, if you work with the local NGOs, and the civil societies, they also learn, and benefit and build the capacities to do it. But when you do it yourselves alone, well, they remain what they are, and after you have come back, there is nothing to continue to happen as a follow up.

Six, be focused on the larger picture of Africa's growth and development, and poverty eradication. These are the issues for Africa.

Seven, avoid unnecessary controversy, especially when working in Africa, except where core issues are at stake. Work with government, not against them.

Eight, be examples of transparency and accountability in your operations. Ask your counterparts in Africa to do the same. Don't demand transparency and accountability on governments while you don't do the same.

[applause]

Your excellencies, in conclusion, let me emphasize that the role of civil society and NGOs goes far beyond advocacy. These organizations have an important role to perform from the grassroots levels to the international scene, from conflict resolution to service delivery, especially in the social sector, where government resources and capacities are strict, and in supporting governments to articulate and come up with corrective strategies for scaling up efforts to achieve the MDGs.

I see you as partners, and together, we can accomplish a lot more for the betterment of the lives of the people in the African continent. Despite the challenges I've outlined today, I believe that the long-term future of Africa is bright, especially if we continue to work together. An African proverb says, "The traveler's path is marked by stars, not the sand dunes." So let us focus on the stars of Africa's future and work to watch them. I ask and hope for your support in that journey. I thank you for your kind attention.

[applause]