

After 5 Years of IERI & 10 Years of our book Putting Africa First: Where does Africa Stand?

Speech By Mammo Muchie, DST/NRF Research Professor of Innovation Studies & Aalborg University, Denmark, May 6, 2010, Tshwane, South Africa.

1. Introduction

My PhD supervisor Professor Freeman, in the Foreword to our book: **Putting Africa First** said: “Especially at this time of global economic instability, this work is needed more than ever to protect science and education from inept and misdirected programmes of ‘structural adjustment’ and to put the last first. Then the stone that the builders rejected may indeed become the cornerstone of the arch.” In the same book another imminent scholar, Bengt Åake Lundvall, also said, “Can the introduction of the innovation system... open up a new vision, “where the last becomes first’ (p.1)

2. Still the Last Remains Last!

The world is going through turmoil now and the Africa the builders condemned has not yet become the cornerstone of the arch. It is not only those from outside of Africa who have learned to know how to continue to exploit Africa’s mineral and human wealth condemning Africa to remain where it has been for over 500 years-in the last place, but also the rent-seeking and public service shying elites in Africa who have developed the currency of corruption to make, retain and condemn Africa to remain last. If Nigeria produces 2 million barrel of oil a day and sells this about 100 dollars per barrel, why is it that Nigeria does not still have reliable energy infrastructure given it revels with all these riches from oil? If Angola harvests 700,000 barrels of oil from Cabinda, why is it that it continues to harvest war rather than electricity for the people especially in Cabinda? What else can we say about those who harvest so much wealth by digging Africa’s mines and still have disproportionate sections of the people in abject poverty. We can only say that for these elites who plunder Africa, Africans and/or Africa is not their priority too. Their real priority is their pocket. They put their pocket first and put Africa last whilst eminent learned Europeans like Chris Freeman and Bengt Åake Lundvall go all the way to support the wake up call Africans make to put Africa first to help raise awareness or even generate the policies to reverse the easy option of always relegating Africa last!

It is 125 years today when European powers tore Africa apart into bizarre pieces. It is 50 years since a third of Africa including Nigeria attained what has been

described post-colonial independence. The problems from that cynical project to divide and rule of Africa live on. The moment of Sudan's independence was also a moment of rebellion that has not been settled to this day. Cabinda is carved as a small independent enclave between Angola and the two Congos. There are states within a state like Lesotho and Swaziland within South Africa. The list of clubbing together disparate groups and splitting apart cognate groups is endless. Every African state has this problem inscribed in the artificial borders others drew with callous indifference and greed.

In spite of this negative legacy, Africa today faces great opportunities before it and it also confronts many problems. What remains open is whether the possibilities will overcome the problems or the problems will undermine the opportunities.

3. South Africa Has the Potential to Provide Leadership

One of the greatest potential opportunities for Africa is the coming of South Africa from its exclusion to be part of Africa and the rest of the world. In 1994 South Africa declared a society where there will be freedom and democracy for citizens and for the rest of the continent, a grand vision of propelling Africa into a renaissance and a 21st century that is going to be African. The twinning of freedom and democracy at home and an African renaissance and African century were the distinctive hallmarks that emerged with South Africa's successful emergence from a racist era to fire the liberation imagination of the African universe. It constitutes part and parcel of the Ethiopian resistance never to surrender to colonialism, slavery and imperialism since the 15th century proxy war fought on Ethiopian soil by the declining Ottoman Empire and the rising Iberian power of Portugal. South Africa today should be prepared to even change the constitution to accommodate the African Renaissance and the African century, and when the time is ripe, South Africa will be prepared to enter into and consolidate African unity. As a leading African economy, its clarity on its readiness when the situation is appropriate to unite with the rest of Africa by not fearing the loss of sovereignty is a paramount principle we should have been hearing from South Africa's intellectuals, media and Government.

Today we have a situation where it is not clear how South Africa is relating to the rest of Africa and how the rest of Africa also sees the role of South Africa's important leadership role in Africa.

As an Ethiopian myself, I am perfectly happy for South Africa to provide leadership in Africa. It has access to forums that many other African states do not have. It matters deeply whether South Africa speaks for Africa or dissipates or squanders

that energy by not following through the magnificent vision of its rebirth into a non-racial democracy into an overall African imagination. South Africa is often invited to G8 and G20 and it also has various linkages with the transition states like Brazil, China and India. At the Climate meeting in Copenhagen, it was not the Africa Union or the European Union the USA chose to negotiate with, it was South Africa, Brazil, India and China. But as South Africa continues to focus attention to these transition countries, it may be losing its pivotal role to inspire the unity of Africa and may render, inadvertently Africa open to forces that may even undermine South Africa itself in the long run. The determination and clarity that above all South Africa must put Africa first in all its policies is paramount to make overall progress that expands the African liberation imagination forward ever and ever.

4. South Africa Can Begin to Reach out with Research and Knowledge Infrastructure in the rest of Africa

Some of us have recognized a possible research, training and knowledge infrastructure building role in Africa as early as 2003 at the time Globelics was launched. I myself went to Kwa Zulu Natal and tried to initiate a knowledge infrastructure building effort connecting the strength of South Africa with the rest of Africa.

Admittedly, in the research and knowledge arena, there is a lot South Africa can do for itself and help also the rest of Africa. It has resources, research, training and quality education, if deployed wisely, can put Africa first, as we put it in our book! It can be the real motivator for opening a new imagination to realize where the 'last becomes the first!

It can also challenge those who have denigrated Africa as a research area, claiming what Africa needs is not universities, but primary education, not PhDs but only vocational graduates.

As Science and Technology Minister Naledi Pandor said, for her country, "increasing the number of graduates was one of the most critical challenges. I talked about well trained PhDs intentionally, and avoided talking about numbers. Whereas it would look good for SA to produce more PhDs, it would be even better if the PhD graduates could contribute to innovation, through which the production and dissemination of knowledge leads to economic benefit and enriches all fields of human endeavour."

From South Africa the rest of Africa can learn the following:

- Building an African research system and quality training where research productivity, capability, utility and quality are integrated.
- Orientating or redirecting the production of knowledge at the local level so that real knowledge for policy learning and innovation can be generated.
- Organising programmes to strengthen and sustain research-developing capabilities
- Demonstrating real achievements to challenge the explicit or implicit assumptions that Africans are not researchers.
- Using its accumulated strengths and research rating and ranking to help strengthen the self-confidence of African researchers and remove the prejudice against Africans the damage from undertaking curiosity driven venturesome research
- To use the way South Africa build research communities, innovations in knowledge and creating the research chairs initiative to build strong inter- African research communities to make Africa as whole rather than each state in fragments to relate well with the rest of the world
- To use its strong rated research universities to inspire and spearhead and build strong research universities in the rest of Africa
- To utilize how South Africa undertakes learning by integrating fundamental research, research and development and local and community level research
- To build excellence through the African Globalics doctoral academy (<http://agda.uonbi.ac.ke>) to increase the production of high quality PhD graduates, research and knowledge. There is a need to provide PhD courses and strengthen research methods training through organizing laboratories and top scientists to train excellent, fearless, venturesome, ethical researchers
- To learn from the NRF and DST and other functioning institutions with recognised systemic regularity to get an overall strengthening of An African research management and leadership skills.

5. Some Key Successes to Date

Following these principles and with the support of colleagues in IERI, The vice chancellor and others at the senior level in TUT, I have been privileged to develop, by using the SARCHi research chair in less than two years, the following:

1. The African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation & Development (www.ajstid.com)
2. The African Globelics Doctoral Academy (<http://agda.uonbi.ac.ke>)
3. The open access electronic journal (Ee-JRIF) <http://www.nesglobal.org/eejrif4/index.php?journal=admin&page=index> and www.nesglobal.org
4. Support and serve as a scientific member of MEDALics: www.MEDALics.org in March, 2010
5. The development of the Globelics scholarly and research network with the purpose of promoting the best research into the remotest and most research difficult developing countries was inspired by the international conference on putting Africa first. Africa was the appropriate choice, as the Globelics experiment is driven by desire to reach the most research difficult areas in the developing world. Next year the conference will mark ten years and the book Putting Africa First is exactly as old as Globelics, becoming part of the launching and inspiring part of the Globelics experiment. (www.Globelics.org)

6. Concluding by Proposing a New Challenge

And we have developed a proposal and once more with Bengt Åke Lundvall we will re-launch the second decade of putting Africa First to remind us the ten year anniversary of our book: Putting Africa First. This will be held in August 2011 where our strategy is not only to make conference and write another book but to find ways in which the unacceptable proclivity of putting Africa last both by Africans and others is challenged with convincing action and evidence-based research. We need to narrow or close the intellectual gap that continues to fester on: The existing inadequate production, knowledge and learning systems in Africa to challenge the deficit for building an African-unification nation where South Africa plays a pivotal part instead of using its current advances to distance itself from Africa in relation to the vision of creating a strong and robust African united national economy. This is a great challenge that needs to be overcome to Put Africa First, realize the African renaissance and make this century to be that of Africa's also and not merely for others. Nothing but the productive power of Africans can make Africa strong. Education, research, knowledge can make a big difference to Africa's future. South Africa has a lot to offer to this challenge right now!