

**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY, THE FORMER
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA,
BENJAMIN W. MKAPA
AT THE COLLOQUIUM ON THE LINKAGES IN THE WORK OF
RESEACH, ADVOCACY, AND MEDIA ORGANISATIONS IN AFRICA**

**5th October 2010, Moevenpick Hotel, Dar es Salaam,
United Republic of Tanzania**

- ***Distinguished guests of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Southern Africa Trust;***
- ***Members of the media;***
- ***Ladies and gentlemen:***

Good evening and a very warm welcome to the United Republic of Tanzania! I assure you that we are proud to host this remarkable event. We believe it will generate a ground-breaking and crucial discussion for productive tripartite cooperation.

I must sincerely thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Southern Africa Trust for this initiative. I know that, since its establishment, the Southern Africa Trust has spared no efforts in supporting voices of poor people to be heard in policy development.

At the end of your meeting you will, have shared experiences and learned from each other, and be able to formulate concepts, strategies and practical actions to effectively join up your work.

I feel personally honoured to have been given the opportunity to address you on this occasion because I strongly believe that poverty can only be overcome through collaborative efforts. No single entity – not even governments – can effectively deal on their own with the challenge of poverty that we face in Africa. We need to work together in a shared historic task to eliminate poverty from our continent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Functioning economies create sustainable solutions to poverty by creating livelihood opportunities. But poverty is a complex problem that requires multiple interventions at once. An enabling context is therefore needed, both to generate functioning economies and to enable poor people to seize the opportunity to equitably participate in growing the economy as a path out of poverty.

The primary enabling framework for functioning economies as a path out of poverty is a policy framework. Governments make public policies. In formulating policies to fight poverty, the policies must not only be pro-poor, but must have had some input from the Poor in rural development, in particular, pro-poor development projects should, as much as possible be designed, owned and managed by the poor themselves. This enables the progress achieved to be realized in dignity and to be sustainable.

Poor people must therefore find ways to engage governments and civil society formations, including businesses, if their interests are to be heard so that policies do not become exclusively captive to limited interests such as the market or the state. Equally, governments and other interest groups in society must engage organisations of poor people if sustainable solutions to poverty are to be found. Voices of poor people must be heard to inform policies and practices to overcome poverty.

One of the satisfying recollections of my Presidency is the introduction of the Tanzania Social Action Fund – TASAF. This is an initiative that recognizes the poor themselves as the drivers of change and to take charge in the fight against poverty. In planning it acknowledged the necessity for a collaborative top-bottom and bottom up approaches to planning and implementation. It facilitates access to information by the rural poor, information which is relevant, timely and easily understood. It empowers them to set their development priorities and allows them to work together, to organize themselves, and to mobilize resources to solve problems of common interest.

To enable this to happen, civil society research, advocacy, and media groups must deepen the ways in which they are more credibly and effectively linked to the voices of poor people and work together to articulate such voices in policy relevant deliberations.

But, to work together, we must know what each other is doing and we must always think in terms of building value adding relationships between each other. This trust is precisely the purpose of this colloquium. It is to explore the potential for stronger cooperative relationships between organizations that work on poverty-related research and policy advocacy, and how that can be taken to the public sphere through strong media linkages.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Poverty reduction policies are often driven by political opinions, ideologies, and donors – not by the experience of people living in poverty. There has therefore been a growing drive to make poverty reduction policies more evidence based; more linked to the reality of lived poverty. The primary way in which this has been done has been a drive to get research results into policy decision-making and practice, and to get policy questions to shape research agendas. In recent years, there has been growing support for innovation in knowledge translation so that the interface between research outcomes and policy development is made easier and more likely. However, researchers are often still frustrated that the innovations they develop do not reach policy makers.

Two obstacles, in my view, stand out in the realization of transmission of knowledge to the policy makers. The one is the culture of exclusive possession of knowledge. This is manifest in the presentation of exclusive media reporting and the rivalry that ensures. It is accompanied by the studied protection of research results through copyright and limited publication. The other is the penchant for excessive secrecy by the bureaucracy superintending the policy formulation process. Civil servants can be unconscionably overbearing and all-knowing!

The introduction of intermediary “knowledge brokers” between researchers and policy makers has therefore emerged as a solution to this problem. Civil society organisations that credibly articulate the

interests and voices of poor people in an evidence-based way can build a shared motive force between researchers and policy makers and create the social capital that is needed to sustain the poverty reduction efforts.

Some development agencies have worked towards this by pushing for greater social accountability work by advocacy groups and the media. They have pushed for the creation of more social “demand” by non-state actors. However, this approach to civil society engagement in policy advocacy is unlikely to yield sustainable solutions to poverty on its own. As a result of weak linkages with researchers and think tanks, many civil society advocacy and campaigning groups lack the technical, policy relevant, and evidence-based knowledge that is required for credible policy engagement, as well as weak linkages with mass media channels to shape public opinion about key poverty challenges. They also often have weak linkages with communities of people directly affected by the issues being advocated on and have very limited access to policy makers. Of course, they also suffer from the effects of fragmentation amongst different civil society groups which dilutes their efforts. This seriously limits the credibility, ability to sustain action, and impact of such civil society initiatives.

The growing cynicism about the contribution of non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations is not unwarranted. There has been a mushrooming of these organizations and societies in recent years, and questions are asked as to the extent that they are homegrown. Often they are extensions or offspring of mother orgs in metropolitan developed countries, hence the concern that they see our poverty through the eyes of their mentors. An ill defined problem will produce an ill-fitting solution. One does not have to elaborate on the one size fits all prescription of the Washington Consensus of three decades ago.

Their prescriptions can further be called into question because many of them are urban based; they lack a network of rural officers, projects, or contacts; and their capacity for issuing statements is not matched by a capacity to cover much of the country. May they not be gambling on their ignorance? I readily plead guilty to being an old man, as tradition states, “fond of giving good advice, to console themselves for being no longer in a position to give bad examples.”

The promotion of more and better linkages between different types of civil society formations – including researchers, civil society advocacy groups, platforms of affected people, the media, and the private sector – for more effective voice, as well as between civil society formations and policymaking institutions, therefore emerges as a key strategy for optimising social capacities for poverty reduction in our region. This will enable the region to “walk on three legs”: civic formations, governments, and businesses together!

Shakespeare described rumour as a pipe, blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures. Well, rigorous policy research and evidence-based advocacy linked to the mass media can create a robust environment for sustained and well-informed public policy debate within a shared vision that can lead to favourable development outcomes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Recent experience has shown that Africa was not wholly spared from the effects of the recent global economic crisis. Some African countries may even experience a reversal of the gains they had made in achieving Millennium Development Goals. Poverty could increase as result of a shrinking tax base, reduced aid flows, a depressed business environment, and low budgetary allocations to the fight against poverty by governments.

The effects of the global financial crisis have also placed huge pressures on the budgets and “value for money” accountability requirements of major donors. This requires innovative responses to sustain the levels of financial support to a wide range of diverse organisations. Civil society organisations in Africa must therefore place a stronger focus on the efficient delivery of results and adaptation of ways of working, including adaptations in ways of working with each other, to respond to the changing aid environment.

Ladies and gentlemen;

Southern Africa generally has weak states and we live increasingly in societies with decentralised power. Power to influence policy frameworks and create change is dispersed across different sectors of society. Power does not reside only in the state. A government’s claim

that it has been democratically elected by the people and represents the people – and therefore does not need to engage with unelected civil society representatives – falls far short of the reality that the state can become captive to a limited set of powerful interest groups in society if it does not continually engage with a diverse range of interest groups, especially organisations of the poor.

Economies increasingly function with inputs from different parts of the society, including the “third sector” of civil society. Voices of the poor are needed to hold the interests of governments, businesses, and civil society organisations socially accountable for the elimination of poverty.

At the same time, weak states by definition lack sufficient technical and institutional capacity to deliver on their social responsibilities. They should not hesitate to draw from existing expertise and other resources in civil society.

A noted response to such governance deficiencies by most development agencies is to strengthen the accountability of governments for social service delivery by supporting non-state actors to demand better delivery of services and development results in general. However, in the context of weak and vulnerable states, this often results in a deterioration of the relationship between state and non-state actors which further undermines the ability of societies to progress. This has the inherent danger of tipping the political context to such an extent that there may result rapid changes in governments, creating further instability and human insecurity, or even a reversal of the development gains that may have been achieved so far.

Alongside the need for a strong civil society sector that is capable of holding governments accountable, we also need institutionalized relationships of cohesion between the major social sectors. We need stronger relationships of cohesion between state and non-state actors, between citizens and governments. Accountability relationships are likely to work better where cohesive relationships exist as a foundation, and where there is shared planning and visioning of our development objectives. African countries have historically suffered from a deficit of social capital between states and non-state actors – and continue to do so today. This retards our progress towards lasting development and it must be changed.

I have, I hope, adequately underscored the legitimacy of the call for researchers, advocates and policy makers to be more effectively engaged and work together in the fight against poverty. One way of ensuring that this happens is for any one party with a proposal or project ensuring that it sets out how the proposal/project affects the other parties and how they in turn can facilitate its implementation. My political party, the CCM, has from inception assiduously promoted gender equality. When I was President, I insisted that Cabinet Papers incorporate the role, quantity the participation and include the cost of women participation. I commend that you, as a tripartite body, try this tactic in your endeavours. It has worked well in our body politic.

I do not know if I have stimulated your minds and helped the framework of your negotiations. But I am comforted by the experience of Daniel Webster, who having written a letter for an ignorant servant, asked the servant, "Is there anything else you wish to say, Mike?" The man servant scratched his head and finally said, "Yes, if you please. Just say they must excuse the poor scholarship and want of sense the letter shows."

I hope you will be equally forgiving. Thank you for your attention.