

SOKOINE UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE



ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

By Prof. Geoffrey Raphael Vehaeli Mmari



On the Occasion of his Conferment of an Honorary Degree (*Doctor honoris causa* (Education) of the Sokoine University of Agriculture

**29th November, 2013
Morogoro, Tanzania.**

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY PROF. GEOFFREY RAPHAEL VEHAELI MMARI ON THE OCCASION OF HIS CONFERMENT OF DOCTOR *HONORIS CAUSA* DEGREE OF THE SOKOINE UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE DURING THE 29TH GRADUATION CEREMONY, 29TH NOVEMBER 2013. MOROGORO, TANZANIA

Mr. Chancellor

Chairman of the University Council

Mr. Vice Chancellor

Members of the University Community

Members of the Congregation

Some two weeks ago, the Vice Chancellor communicated the unexpected news that SUA had decided to honor me at to-day's congregation. I was aware from previous practice that a University could confer an honorary degree upon any person who had rendered distinguished service in the advancement of any branch of leaning or who had otherwise rendered himself worthy of such a degree (degree of Master or Doctor). It is drawing from such legal powers that the University of East Africa had conferred eminent men and women its honorary doctorates. The last such occasion was held on Friday, 26th June, 1970 during the twentieth congregation of the University held in the Assembly Hall (now Nkrumah Hall) when three distinguished men were awarded such honorary degrees. These were Karl Worth Bigelow conferred the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature, Solomon Nkya Eliufoo the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws and Edward Walter Russell, the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science.

To drive home the East African-ness of the University, each member of the East African Community was represented in the ceremony. Professor A. Mazrui was University Orator for Karl Worth Bigelow representing Makerere in Uganda, Dr. A Temu (as he was titled then) University Orator for Solomon Nkya Eliufoo from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Professor David Wasawo for Edward Walter Russell representing Nairobi Kenya.

Two years after SUA was established in 1984, the University of Zimbabwe decided to confer the Degree of Doctor of Laws *Honoris causa* on the late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere and Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. The Vice Chancellor, the late Professor Walter Kamba was University Orator for both. Mr. Mandela could not attend in person since he was not yet free and was thus represented by his daughter Mrs. Zenani Mandela Dlamini.

Six months before his death in 1999 Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere was conferred the Doctor of letters honoris causa by the open University of Tanzania where the University Orator was the visually impaired Dr. Edward Bagandashwa.

The background to these cases, a sample from a greater cross section emphasizes my great surprise. It is for this reason that I thank The Sokoine University of Agriculture for this honour. As is the practice, the decision went through the various channels and was by no means automatic.

I am grateful that the Chancellor presiding at this ceremony was my Chairman of Council at University of Dar es Salaam and now Chancellor here at SUA.

In response to this award, I was drawn to the following verse from a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

"Lives of great men all remind us, We can make our lives sublime and,
departing leave behind us Footprints on the sands of time"

which has been used by that academic historian Professor Bethwell Ogot as title for his autobiography "My Footprints on the Sands of Time". Some eminent men and women have made such distinguished foot - print that they have been awarded the Nobel Prize. The world is no longer the same as a result of the contributions. Others have changed the livelihood of millions as a decoctionresult of their research. They may not have been awarded some other prestigious honours and prizes, But all the same their impacts are appreciated.

Our footprints are made at different levels and their scopes in intensity. Some of us have been able to make an impact on those we teach to the extent that generations thank God we taught them. This takes place at the school level, in institutions of

higher learning and in the larger community. Our decoctions, our commitment, the inspiration we fire make a whole difference between marginal success and significant change in people's lives.

Our footprints are discernible in the research we undertake. Lives have been saved through research conducted by us or supervised by us. New ways of doing business have emerged from works of great insight and foresight.

In a recent book edited by Prof. Keto Mshigeni and Prof. Ludovick Kinabo and published by the Tanzania Academy of Science we read about lives of 31 eminent Tanzania scientists, some of who are on the staff of SUA. In his 'Foreword to the Book, Prof Mohamed Hassan remarks "The book shows that the scientists whose stories are narrated, were inspired by and large by caring committed and dedicated great teachers, who lit a fire in their minds..... Reading some of the stories, I was reminded also of Louis Pasteur (1822 -1895), son of a tanner, who started a humble beginnings (his school grades initially mediocre) but who was determined to succeed and who through commitment and hard work, a keen sense of observation, and sharp scientific curiosity, became the father of modern bacteriology."

SUA is itself a good example of an institution that has produced men and women who have made significant footprints on the sands of time. There are hardly any activities of national importance which are not touched by an input of a SUA research scientist or a group of them.

There was one University in 1963 that took into account the higher education needs of East Africa. In 1970 we witnessed the establishment of two more to make a total of three. Today, the number has grown into hundreds with thousands of students. Older institutions such as SUA, have an obligation to make sure that footprints are made and that they stand the test of time. The older institutions are themselves growing larger with respect to student enrolment and staff deployment. New institutions are coming on board at fairly fast pace. The end result is a challenge to maintain good quality in teaching and research. It calls for greater

commitment and devotion. Others have lived up to similar challenges elsewhere. We can do the same.

In conclusion, let me once again thank you Mr. Chancellor and all those who were involved in one way or the other with the nomination. I hope I will live up to the trust you have so graciously put in me. I thank you for your attention.