

**Keynote Address by Ambassador Juma V. Mwapachu
at the Launch of the Report of Uwezo East Africa:
'Are Our Children Learning? Numeracy and Literacy Across East Africa,'
Karimjee Hall, Dar es Salaam, 4 July 2011**

Dear Twaweza Board Chair, Twaweza and Uwezo Staff and supporters, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for inviting me to join you at this event marking the official launch of this report provided by Uwezo East Africa titled, 'Are Our Children Learning?' I wish to pay special thanks to Rakesh Rajani for his efforts in securing the best possible participation at this important and historic event. Together, we tried to have the new Secretary General of the East African Community, Ambassador Dr. Richard Sezibera, be here and be the Chief Guest. Unfortunately, Dr. Sezibera is travelling to Geneva tomorrow and could not adjust his travel plans which commence from Nairobi. He was kind enough though to write the foreword to the report being launched today, for which Uwezo, I am sure, is grateful for.

Presumably, because of Dr. Sezibera's absence, I have been made the guinea pig. But nothing could give me greater pleasure, I can assure you, than having the honour and opportunity to participate in what I know is probably the most critical aspect of the challenges East Africa and especially Tanzania faces in social and economic development. Interestingly, the question about the quality of education and its close relationship to development is not restricted to developing, poor countries. But it is one of those simple assumptions many of us in the Global South tend to make. The reality is different.

Take the case of the United States, which in the 1960s led the world in a number of educational outcomes. Their leadership in the world economy was largely driven by the high quality of education from kindergarten through university. However, the OECD found out that in 2006, the US ranked 25th out of 30 industrialized countries in math and 24th in science. Worse, cross-country comparisons of US students at two different ages, of nine and 15, revealed that the closer the school leavers come to joining the labour force, the further they lagged behind their international counterparts- in reading, math and science. McKinsey, the global consulting firm, has estimated that this gap, if the US had bridged it by 1998, and reaching the education qualities of top performers such as Finland and South Korea, the US GDP could have been \$1.2 -3.3 trillion US higher than in 2008. (Source: The Economic Cost of the US Education Gap, McKinsey Quarterly, June, 2009).

Paradoxically, in August 1981, the US Government awoke to the realization that the quality of education was in serious decline. It proceeded to establish the National Commission on Excellence in Education to review and redress the situation. The report of the Commission, whose title, 'A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform,' shocked US policy makers and the public alike. It pointed out what is described as the 'rising tide of mediocrity' in American schools.

I am flagging my remarks with the US education background to simply highlight and underscore the point, namely that there is a global concern about declining levels in education. The difference however is that some countries, some rich but some that were not as rich as they have now become, largely because of putting education, especially primary education, on the front burner of their economic policies, such as South Korea, have taken giant leaps in improving their educational systems. For those interested in pursuing this comparative analysis in educational reforms, you may wish to read McKinsey and Company Report (2011) authored by Mona Mourshed, Chinezi Chijioko and Richard Barber, titled, 'How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better.' Their sample covered 20 school systems from different parts of the world, including Ghana and Western Cape, South Africa, in Africa.

Friends, allow me to commend Uwezo for undertaking this awesome research that has led to the production of this report. Rakesh has clearly introduced us to the process that Uwezo used in obtaining the results of the report. Dr. Ruto has also outlined the key findings covered in the report. Therefore, I need not dwell on these two aspects though I will touch on some of these in clarifying my thoughts.

But first of all, let me state that this report has come out at the most propitious time. In July last year, the East African Community launched a common market. One of its pillars is free movement of labour. And as many of you know, it is this particular freedom, more than the other three freedoms of free movement of people, of services and of capital, that raises a great deal of anxiety and even fear in the region and particularly in Tanzania. At the heart of this concern is how the variables in the quality of education in the EAC Partner States will determine competitive advantage in securing skilled jobs. The report being launched here provides key insights regarding the context of the anxieties and fears in the EAC region. To this extent, the report may viciously vindicate the raised concerns and even be abused for what it spells out.

This would be unfortunate for two reasons. First, the aim of the report is not to politicize the dynamic zero sum gain integration. Regional integration can never produce equal win-win outcomes. The purpose of regional integration is to promote incremental win-win outcomes over time through explaining the advantages of scale and scope, cutting across key factors that drive economic fruits and informing quality of life. Education is one such factor for which much remains to be done at the EAC level though initial work has commenced through the work of the Inter-University Council for East Africa. This work partly underlies the harmonization of education systems and curricula for primary school to university level and, partly, the improvement in the delivery of education through the use of ICT.

The second reason is that the Uwezo report spells out a generic crisis of primary education in the EAC countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. There is generalized underachievement by children in our schools as shown by low levels of literacy and numeracy. As alluded to earlier, education is the most critical factor in the social and economic performance of our countries. This is because the quality of labour that stimulates scientific innovations is crucial in fostering the productivities of all the sectors of our economies. As an economically integrated region, the EAC would inevitably fall behind in competitiveness vis a vis the rest of the world if the quality of primary education remains at the levels featured in the Uwezo report.

In the Global Competitiveness Report 2010, out of 139 countries, Kenya is positioned at 108, Tanzania at 117, and Uganda at 133 in the pillar of health and primary education index. This data confirms the conclusions in the Uwezo report about the low status of primary schooling in the region.

It is generally agreed by educational experts that socially, emotionally, cognitively, academically, intellectually and in virtually most ways, children become what they learn to become at primary school level. When that opportunity is lost, it is invariably difficult to recover it in later stages of school life. In this regard, therefore, the Uwezo Report is raising an important alarm about the dangers the EAC faces as an economic and social project. This integration could falter in terms of the planned and envisioned outcomes if the outcomes from its primary schools remain where they are today.

The second major area I want to address with respect to the report has to do with the whole question regarding the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and notably the two out of the eight that allude to education. These goals relate to the achievement of universal

primary education (UPE) by 2015, all girls and boys complete a full course of primary schooling. You'll agree with me, and the Uwezo report acknowledges this fact, that UPE has been largely successful and gross enrollment ratios for boys and girls in the EAC region are one of the highest in Africa. Moreover, we have witnessed government expenditures allocated to primary education skyrocketing in the past 10 years. A United Nations report, 'Financing Education in Sub-Saharan Africa' shows that the proportion of public spending on education in Sub-Saharan Africa, averaging 5% of GDP, is the second largest in the world behind only North America and Europe whose GDP expenditure averages 5.3%.

However, the challenge has been how to make these high expenditures with quality. Moreover, this challenge is being accentuated by the big growth in population where the percentage of primary school going children between the ages of 0-14 averages 40% in the EAC region. In Tanzania it is 43.1%. Thus, to sustain such large budget outlays is quite a challenge. Worse, as the US example earlier showed, where such investments do not produce talent and quality, the cost to the economy can be way beyond what governments spend on advancing education. This could be the case with UPE where there are low levels of competency in literacy and numeracy.

It is in this context that three World Bank experts in 2006 came up with an alternative to the MDG, in relation to UPE, what they call the Millennium Learning Goal (MLG), 'Measuring Real Progress in Education' (see Centre for Global Development). MLG centers on, one, the definition of a realistic set of competencies as low and high learning targets; two, agreement on how to measure desired competencies for schooling on a regular basis; three, using international comparisons to measure performance of age cohorts rather than school grades. It would be interesting to determine where Uwezo's thinking lies in this debate between UPE goals as part of MDG and the MLG preposition. The third broad area I want to focus upon is on the admitted shortcomings of the Uwezo report. One measure relating to the role of the quality of teaching, teacher motivation and practical accountability as determinants of school performance was not covered in the research and report. Yet, the report has a statement to the effect that 'only a weak association was found between school quality and performance' on the Uwezo tests. What defines school quality then?

The other aspect in the report that leaves an important question unanswered is the measurement of the differential in school performance in districts vis a vis the wealth-poor dimension of students. Uwezo has not gone into analyzing, for instance, with only 2% of primary school students in Tanzania attending private school, what distinguishes the excellence in achievement by Moshi Urban, Rombo, and Moshi Rural primary schools. Are these schools largely private and what is the wealth-poverty mix of students in these schools for the report has come up with the conclusion that children from poor families perform worse than those from wealthier families. This would be interesting data because, depending on the quality of school (which the Uwezo report falls short on in defining its real attitudes that are evidence-based from those that are merely esoteric), the achievement outcomes of students may not constitute a valid criteria for distinguishing students from varying social backgrounds!

I attended a middle school in Tukuyu, Rungwe District (Standard 5-8) from 1955-1958 where students from poor families outperformed those from so called wealthy families or from advanced families. The defining factor was quality of the school teaching and support facilities.

Finally friends, let me appreciate the report's coverage of parental and adult influence and impact on the achievement of students in our primary school education and especially the role of mothers, notably those with secondary education and above. What I want to emphasize is that the role of parents and adults generally in affecting the character and learning attitudes of children is extremely fundamental. I have been reading a book recently by the acclaimed British sociologist, Frank Furidi,

titled, 'WASTED: Why Education isn't Educating.' Furidi puts adult responsibility at the core of the education of children. He argues, 'if adults in general are reluctant or confused about giving guidance to the younger generation, the challenge facing the teacher in the classroom can sometimes become overwhelming.' He cites a 2009 statement of the President of the British Association of Teachers and Lecturers, Bob Lightman, who complained that teachers were expected to teach children who 'seem never to have the opportunity to have a conversation outside school with an adult.'

I am happy that this report brings out the issue of parent and adult responsibility to the centre stage of education of children. It is an issue to be acknowledged and brought into the public arena of discussion. As Furidi asserts, there is need for a 'cultural affirmation' of the importance of adult responsibility in the education of children and that without the evaluation of such adult authority, 'much of the teacher's hard work and effort and society's resources are wasted.' Uwezo should champion this cultural affirmation idea.

Friends, let me conclude by once again complimenting Uwezo for this pioneering and path-breaking study on the status of our primary education systems in the EAC region. This study should be extended to cover Rwanda. Burundi will be a difficult case because of the language issue. I know that this report may provoke angry and aggressive reactions from the public policy arena and political leadership. But the time has come for countries to move beyond working on the basis of symptoms of our problems and addressing their underlying, deep seated cases. In Tanzania, we witness how such approach to the energy crisis has for years been undermined by the lack of a long term strategic policy plan. The energy problem has consistently been addressed on a tactical basis. Even military generals would tell you that you cannot win war on a tactical basis. Nelson did so at Waterloo but that was ages ago.

The Uwezo report offers, for the first time in East Africa, a solid and robust, well researched analysis and insights on the current status of our primary education, which if well internalized and appropriate interventions are taken, the EAC region should be able to see a dramatic transformation in quality of primary school education outcomes. The time is now; our nations are indeed at risk and we can, as governments, as citizens, the private sector and as civil societies, change the course of our destiny and make Tanzania and the EAC countries generally a region of talent, innovation, resourcefulness and competitiveness. Well done Uwezo and continue the good work.

Thank you and God bless.