

International engagement matters to all of us: honouring Hans Manneby Legacy

Mr Paul Msemwa, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, November 10, 2009

Tanzania is a country of diverse people and cultures (120 Ethnic groups) and has always been connected to the world community even before the Christian era; trading with Arabs, Indians, Chinese and later Europeans. These interactions based on trade (goods and human beings- slave trade) led to the establishment of prosperous medieval settlements and towns such as Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara a world heritage site and Kaole in Bagamoyo. By the 19 and 20th Centuries Tanganyika was a colony first under Germans and later under the British. Tanzania with a population of close to 35 million people Kiswahili is the official national language and the predominant religions are Islam, Christianity and African traditional ones.

What I stand for

- Principles that have guided me in my international engagement are a belief in equality of human beings, the willingness to share experiences and knowledge with others and importance of embracing changes.
- The recognition of our rich histories, diverse cultures and environments that have made the world we live in a laboratory or a source of new ideas and knowledge.
- An appreciation for importance of overcoming challenges of fear, ignorance and arrogance imposed upon us all by our histories, social systems and power structures.

How I came to be

- Born and grew up in a big family of illiterate parents in a rural area January 1953, Southern Highlands of Tanzania. That is where my mother language **Bena** is spoken and was introduced to my national language Kiswahili during my Grade 1-4 years of education. Bena now number close to 400,000 people and they are among seven ethnic groups found in Iringa region with an estimated population of 1.6 million people. Growing up in this area we experienced difficulties but also some happy moments; **the cold and freedom.**
- From Grades 5 up to University level had always been in multi-cultural settings; meeting people of different cultures, histories and education backgrounds. This was the period I experienced many things; both good and bad, some with a lasting imprint to my carrier in life in terms of how I relate with others.
- My ethnographic and archaeological research work supported by Sida/SAREC on women shellfish collectors along the coast of Tanzania further introduced and inspired me to appreciate the importance of listening to others views on their environment and their perspective of the world we live in. Indeed my long museum carrier and commitment to international engagement to a large extent is attributed to the work of women collecting shellfish on the coast of Tanzania

and the encounters I came across in the USA in pursuit of education; especially on ignorance, arrogance and fears about Africa.

- My engagement with Swedish African Museum network (Samp); has taken me to different regions of the world and exposed to diverse cultures e.g. Siberia, Europe, different parts of Africa etc. Indeed, travelling is expensive in terms of time and money, but it is very rewarding for one to learn new ideas and challenges.

My contributions

Like the late Hans Manneby I am an archaeologist who has conducted several Archaeological and Ethnographic researches in Tanzania on history, culture and environment. The results of the research work have significantly influenced me on how I view the world and society. Over the years I have come to appreciate and champion the participatory approach and to engage the public in addressing social issues such as human rights, environment and poverty. An example is the Ethnic Days programme; which has been very successful and has influenced Tanzanian society immensely.

- The Ethnic Days programme was initiated in 1994 at the Village Museum to address issues of identity and unity of the different ethnic groups through an open dialogue and to sustain the museum operations by engaging the community. This is an annual event for communities to celebrate their histories and cultures and it is highly appreciated by communities and the government.
- Installation of an exhibit on Slave trade and Slavery at Caravan Serai, Bagamoyo to highlight the root causes of poverty and abuse of human rights to which we are all responsible.

Have shared my experiences and knowledge with professionals and engaged the public; popularization of research findings.

- Establishment of Site Museums; e.g. Kaole Site Museum; Bagamoyo to correct misrepresentation of African history.

Strived and given Communication a high priority through development of exhibits such as the History of Gotland and Kilwa Kisiwani World Heritage sites and travelling exhibitions, meetings and conferences, presentations and publications (King George, Ethnic Days at Village Museum etc.).

One could ask how I a child of a poor illiterate peasant family succeed to obtain the education and whatever that I have managed to achieve? There are three explanations to this general question:

First, it is the colonial economic system that forced my farther and many others of his time to work in gold mines in South Africa and sisal plantations in Tanganyika so as to be able pay government taxes. By working in the mines and plantations my farther was exposed to other cultures and to value western education to the extent that he had the courage to sell his valued few cattle to get money to pay my school fees from Grade 1 to Grade 8. Unfortunately my two sisters had to miss such a valuable asset; education.

Second, it is due to post independence educational policies lay down by Mwl. J. K. Nyerere who strongly believed that human development could not be achieved without a meaningful and relevant education system that would address ignorance, poverty and diseases challenges that hinder the desire to achieve human dignity, equality among people, respect and tolerance which are still relevant today. In short, it is due to the social system that made me proud of my people and country.

Third, it is the international engagement which has exposed me to people with diverse cultures.

Honouring Hans Manneby's Legacy

In honouring Hans Manneby our duty should be to continue the work of searching for new knowledge and working closely with communities that surrounds us. This is because human tendency is to take things for granted without reflecting on impacts of our actions to others. Working in multi-cultural settings exposes our ignorance and helps us to reflect on our actions and attitudes towards others.

He was an active and engaging individual who always had a great desire for learning and committed much of his time working with the communities to contribute to their social wellbeing. He achieved this because he was an effective communicator, respected other cultures and point of views.

Hans Manneby possessed unique attributes required in international engagement; tolerance, respect, ability to listen to others point of views and valued openness. I will give an example to illustrate Manneby's openness and as a person of integrity. At one occasion; in the course of our Samp engagement and Manneby as Chairperson of the Executive Committee, he wished to contest for President of Swedish ICOM while he was still Chairperson of Samp Executive Committee. If elected President of Swedish ICOM he knew he would be making decisions on matters referred to the Swedish ICOM Board by Samp Executive Committee. The question raised in the meeting was whether it was proper for Hans Manneby to contest for President of Swedish ICOM while he was still the Chairperson of Samp Executive Committee. The two African Committee members thought it would be improper whereas majority of the Executive committee members thought it was proper. After the meeting we came to learn that the two African Committee members who opposed the majority position were viewed as being against Hans Manneby's aspiration!

The position of the two African Committee members was a matter of principle; to protect integrity of Samp Executive Committee. This reasoning was based on the fact that the Swedish ICOM Board independence would have been impaired when making decision referred to it by Samp. For instance, how would the Swedish ICOM President feel when Swedish ICOM Board would have turned down decisions referred to it by Samp Executive Committee? What we learn from this example is that majority opinion is not always the right one.

Conclusion

To have made the above modest achievements I had to overcome a number of challenges especially those linked to peoples' ignorance of the other. Otherwise, thanks to my growing up and working in a multi-cultural setting and exposure to an international working environment which has helped me overcome some of the encounters and stand firm on matters of principle, sometimes even differing with my colleagues and even superiors.

From my presentation it should be apparent that international engagement matters to all of us since we are now living in a global village. And with an improved transport infrastructure and ICT what happens in one part it is fast known and affects other parts as well. This means there is no way we can hide or avoid interacting with each other because challenges of poverty, climate change, human rights abuse and conflicts affect all of us. Instead, international engagement promotes human understanding, tolerance and peace, and it is a source of inspiration for new ideas and new knowledge. Our ignorance about others I have argued; through a reflection of my personal history, is the worst enemy of prejudice, intolerance to others views and cultures and arrogance. Let me end my presentation by emphasizing the fact that each person's views needs to be respected and our communities matter a lot. This is my plea to you all.

- Transformation of National Museum Dar es Salaam into a National Museum and House of Culture to serve as a platform for dialogue.