

Why Africa needs to focus on Science and technology?

Source: The Pan African Newspaper

This week's decision by the African Union announcing the launch of the Julius Mwalimu Nyerere Scholarship Scheme for science and technology, to boost expertise in scientific research in Africa is a move that requires applause. Science is an indispensable tool that Africa needs to leap towards development. Even more befitting is the move to name the initiative after one of the OAU's founding fathers.

For quite some time now, African states have emphasized on the need towards achieving technological transfer in all manners of relations with the rest of the world, be it in trade & investment, telecommunications, health, airlines and host of other areas. Much of Africa's woes in regards to poverty, disease and slow economic development stems from the fact that Africa has not developed its scientific prowess. This often is exasperated with the growing brain drain that affects almost all nations of the continent. The few scientists Africa comes up with often end up in universities and research institutes in the West. Often the cause of such an exodus are attributed to conflict, poor salaries and lack of incentives for our scientific elite to stay in the continent. The 1980s and 1990s are indicative of this where our political elite who are often at loggerheads with our scholars have prompted in killing, imprisoning and exiling our scholars. African scholars have often been voices of dissent towards what they call abuse of power by the state.

Policies are often formulated by governments to allow scientific research to grow and prosper in specific nations but lack of perception and the will to encourage our scientists to stay within the continent still prevails in much of Africa. The loss of our intellectual elite has a ripple effect on all of us; we not only lose out on the precious resources nations have invested in the education and training of our scientists but also lose out on African role models that would encourage coming generations to work hard to emulate their role models.

We all know the value of scientific advances where innovations help make our lives easier, improving the ways things are done and help minimize costs. Here research in regards to disease, boosting agricultural produce, engineering and telecom and others are all what Africa needs to do away with decades' old poverty and under production. Africa needs to stop praising advances in the West and elsewhere and start building our scientific prowess. Africa is not new to science ;centuries ago Egyptian scientists were masters of astronomy and could calculate the rising and falling of the Nile, Egypt is also credited for the construction of the pyramids which continues to be one of the marvels of the world, Timbuktu was a center of learning, the obelisks

of Axum are engineering feats and let us not forget our traditional healers that have not only helped in curing diseases but were instrumental in our struggles for independence. Africa has made so many achievements in science in the past that we often fail to build on these advances in the present.

One finds oneself hard pressed to know of any African award for scientific achievement in the continent. Is this because Africa has finally given hope of ever coming up with an African renaissance or are we too involved in dealing with natural disasters and conflict to focus on science?. Whatever may be the reason, a concerted effort should be initiated across the continent to address our deficiencies in scientific development. it is hoped that next week's AU summit which is appropriately themed "Science, Technology and Scientific Research for Development" and "Climate Change in Africa" will open discussions for the advancement of science in Africa.

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