

# Mkapa slams multinationals over bio-piracy

By Guardian Reporter

PRESIDENT Benjamin Mkapa yesterday criticised multinational corporations for their tendency to engage in bio-piracy of indigenous African knowledge in order to reap huge profits.

President Mkapa made the remarks when speaking at the launch of the World Bank publication *Indigenous Knowledge (IK): Local Pathways to Global Development* in Dar es Salaam yesterday.

The President said: "The global intellectual property rights regime must prevent

bio-piracy that seeks to patent biological materials, especially plants, known throughout our generations for their value and altered in laboratories to claim an invention and win a patent."

He added: "... multinationals make huge profits from exploiting African biodiversity. It is imperative, therefore, that the IK within the intellectual property rights regime be reappraised to allow communities and countries to also lay claims to the intrinsic knowledge extracted from IK without recompense."

President Mkapa also said Africans had in many cases been losing their own property

based on IK as a result of ongoing bio-piracy.

"In many cases, we have lost what has been ours but which has been exploited by others and ultimately even rendered inaccessible to us as original contributors to the value chain of what turned out to be commercially available products," he said.

Explaining on the crucial role of IK, he said over 4,000 HIV/Aids patients in Tanga who had missed out on antiretroviral drugs were still alive because of treatment they had been receiving from traditional healers equipped with IK. "The IK notes have proven that Africa has rich

reservoir of trans-generational knowledge and practical experiences that can be exploited to complement our development efforts," he said and added that IK was an important tool for fighting poverty through locally based innovations.

President Mkapa said Tanzania's goal for developing IK was to embark on a programme aimed at fostering community propagation of IK achievements, supporting IK innovations and mainstreaming IK into professional training in health, agriculture and livestock-keeping.