

# **“THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT - THE CASE OF AFRICA”**

*SPEECH BY*

PROFESSOR PLO-LUMUMBA  
LL. D, D.Litt. (hc), D.Sc. (hc), FCPS (K), FKIM, FAAS (hon)

---

**ON THE OCCASION OF COMMEMORATION OF 100  
YEARS OF OMUKAMA CWA II KABALEEGA'S  
LEGACY (1923 – 2023) HELD AT KAMPALA  
SERENA HOTEL – VICTORIA AUDITORIUM, IN  
KAMPALA, UGANDA ON THE 18<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF  
DECEMBER, 2023.**

---

*THEME: Celebrating a hero's life, leveraging 100 years' legacy to inspire  
social, cultural, and economic development”*

*(18<sup>th</sup> December, 2023  
Kampala, Uganda)*

The history of pre-colonial Africa is dotted with the history of organized kingdoms across the continent. It is this history that was rudely interrupted starting with slavery and ending with colonization.

History records the presence of organized African kingdoms in the Southern, Western, Central and Eastern Africa. Rich literature has been written about the organized societies amongst the Yoruba, the Akan, the Yoruba, the Congo, the Zulu, the Mwenemutapa, the Buganda, the Batoro, the Banyankole and the Bunyoro Kitara, one of whose most illustrious kings, Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega we are assembled here to celebrate on the occasion of 100 years of his legacy.

European anthropologists and historians have over the years created the impression that African societies were disorganized and did not contribute to any notable development. Yet we know in different fields, African societies had excelled. The pyramids in Egypt and Sudan, the walls of Benin, the majestic structures found in Timbuktu, the walls of Mwenemutapa, the majestic ground bound edificas in Lalibela all demonstrate the architectural prowess of African societies.

In terms of societal organization, the structure to be found among the Yoruba, the Congo and the Zulu demonstrate the levels of

organization. In the areas of science, the profound astronomical knowledge of the Dogon in confirms how knowledgeable Africans were in Astronomy.

The disruption of African Societies by Invaders initially from the Arab world and subsequently from the Europeans disrupted and destroyed African ways. However, culture dies hard and having grappled with different systems of governance in the post-colonial era, it is gratifying that African Societies are once again beginning to ask the legitimate question regarding the role of culture in promoting development.

The place of culture in human development cannot be gainsaid. Indeed, this is what gives meaning to the Swahili saying, 'mwachamila ni mtumwa' (he who abandons culture is a slave). The Post-Colonial African State continues to grapple with what is described as development which encompasses socio-economic, cultural and spiritual growth.

Many models and initiatives have come and gone; Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), various visions, and what is considered to be more Afrocentric, Agenda 2063. But somehow, whenever we think that we have diagnosed the ailment, whenever we apply a new

ointment, new wounds appear, begging the question whether we are applying band-aid solutions to cancerous problems.

It is in this regard that culture must now be given its pride of place. Several years ago, on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of January 2006 to be exact, the African Union adopted the 'Charter for African Cultural Renaissance' with a view to giving culture new impetus. Today therefore, as we examine the role of culture in promoting development, we must remind ourselves that no culture ever realized sustainable development on its own.

Culture is the fabric that weaves societies together, encompassing traditions, beliefs, values, and practices. It is a powerful force that shapes the way we perceive the world and interact with each other.

Cultural practices, traditions, and values play a pivotal role in the achievement of sustainable development. Consider, for instance, the role of education. Cultural attitudes towards education can profoundly impact access to and the quality of education in communities. By understanding and respecting diverse cultural perspectives, we can tailor education initiatives that resonate with local communities, ensuring inclusivity and sustainability.

Moreover, culture is an indispensable factor in addressing environmental concerns. Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices often hold valuable insights into sustainable ways of living in harmony with nature. Preserving and promoting these cultural practices can contribute significantly to global efforts to combat climate change.

Culture is not confined to the boundaries of a nation or the strokes of a brush; it is an intricate web that interlaces traditions, customs, language, arts, and values. It is the collective expression of a people, passed down through generations, shaping identities and fostering a sense of belonging.

Consider language, not just as a means of communication but as a vessel that carries the collective wisdom and nuances of a community. The arts, in their various forms, are not mere decorations but narratives that encapsulate the stories, struggles, and triumphs of a people. Values, embedded in cultural fabrics, guide behavior, instill principles, and serve as the compass by which societies navigate their journeys.

Now, let us turn our gaze to the magnificence of cultural diversity that blankets our planet. Every corner of the globe boasts a unique set of customs, traditions, and ways of life, making our world a rich mosaic of human experience. This diversity is not merely a

spectacle; it is a source of strength and resilience, holding immense potential for sustainable development.

In the context of the Sustainable Development, cultural diversity is a wellspring of innovation, creativity, and holistic problem-solving. The richness of different cultures offers varied perspectives on addressing global challenges. For instance, the approach to healthcare in one culture may hold valuable insights that, when integrated into broader strategies, enhance the overall effectiveness of health-related development.

Cultural diversity is not a hindrance to unity; it is the very foundation upon which a harmonious future can be built. By embracing and celebrating our differences, we create an environment where the collective strengths of various cultures contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to achieving sustainable development.

It is important to recognize that culture is not a static entity but a dynamic force that can propel us towards a sustainable and equitable future. It is the wellspring of creativity, the repository of wisdom, and the heartbeat of societies.

In a world striving for sustainable development, the fusion of cultural practices and the principles of sustainability is not a luxury

but a necessity. As we navigate these uncharted waters, we must ensure that our course is guided by the twin compasses of cultural integration and sensitivity.

Let us first examine the intricate dance between cultural practices and the principles of sustainability. Cultures, over centuries, have developed practices that inherently align with the sustainable use of resources, environmental stewardship, and community resilience.

Consider, for instance, indigenous communities whose sustainable agricultural practices have sustained them for generations. Their intimate knowledge of the land, respectful farming techniques, and harmonious relationship with nature have not only ensured their survival but have valuable lessons for the broader world in achieving environmental sustainability.

Traditional agricultural practices deeply rooted in cultural heritage can provide sustainable and environmentally friendly approaches to food production. Preserving and integrating indigenous farming methods can contribute to achieving food security while respecting the planet.

Culture, with its emphasis on communal values and solidarity, can be a powerful tool in poverty alleviation efforts. By harnessing

community support systems, we can create sustainable solutions that address the root causes of poverty and empower marginalized groups.

Cultural practices that prioritize holistic well-being, preventive healthcare, and the use of traditional remedies can complement modern medical approaches. Integrating these cultural insights into health policies can enhance overall community health and resilience.

Cultural values often emphasize the importance of education. By aligning educational practices with cultural values and contexts, we can foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment, ensuring that education becomes a powerful instrument for sustainable development.

Cultural norms play a pivotal role in shaping gender roles and expectations. Efforts to achieve gender equality must involve the transformation of cultural narratives that perpetuate discrimination. Cultural empowerment programs can contribute to breaking down gender barriers.

Many cultures have deep-rooted traditions of water conservation and sustainable resource management. By integrating these practices into water and sanitation policies, we can work towards



ensuring universal access to clean water while preserving our natural resources.

Indigenous knowledge often includes sustainable energy practices. By incorporating traditional energy solutions into modern frameworks, we can move towards affordable and clean energy sources, reducing our environmental impact.

Cultural entrepreneurship and traditional craftsmanship can be harnessed to promote economic growth. By valuing and preserving cultural industries, we create opportunities for decent work and sustainable economic development.

Cultural diversity is a wellspring of creativity and innovation. Fostering an environment that celebrates diverse cultural expressions can spur innovation and contribute to the development of sustainable infrastructure.

Urban planning that respects cultural heritage and community traditions can lead to the creation of sustainable, inclusive cities. Integrating cultural elements into urban development ensures that communities thrive in harmony with their surroundings.

Cultural values often include principles of frugality and responsible resource use. By promoting these values, we can work towards

sustainable consumption and production patterns that respect the limits of our planet.

Indigenous knowledge about ecosystems and sustainable living can contribute significantly to climate action. Incorporating traditional practices into climate policies can enhance our collective efforts to combat climate change.

Cultural reverence for nature can drive efforts to protect marine environments. Integrating traditional knowledge into marine conservation strategies can contribute to the preservation of life below water.

Cultural practices that emphasize the interconnectedness of all living things can inspire sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation. Integrating these practices into environmental policies contributes to the preservation of life on land.

Cultural understanding and respect are foundational to building peaceful and just societies. Promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity can contribute to the establishment of strong institutions that uphold the principles of justice and equality.

Cultural diplomacy and collaborative efforts grounded in shared cultural values can foster global partnerships for sustainable

development. Building bridges of understanding and mutual respect enhances our collective capacity to address global challenges.

These examples underscore the potential for cultural practices not only to coexist with sustainability but to lead the way in crafting innovative solutions to global challenges.

Now, let us pivot to the crucial aspect of cultural sensitivity in facilitating sustainable development. As we navigate the complex landscape of development, it is imperative that we recognize the importance of understanding and respecting diverse cultural perspectives.

Cultural sensitivity is not a mere formality but a prerequisite for success. It involves recognizing that one size does not fit all and that solutions must be tailor-made to resonate with the unique identities of communities. By understanding the intricacies of diverse cultures, we can design interventions that are not only effective but also culturally resonant.

The need for culturally sensitive approaches is not limited to the realm of social goals. It extends to economic development and environmental conservation. By incorporating cultural nuances

into our strategies, we ensure inclusivity, community ownership, and the long-term sustainability of our endeavors.

In our exploration of cultural heritage and leadership, we must cast our gaze upon the 19th-century leader of the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom, the indomitable Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega.

Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega, born around 1869, emerged as a pivotal figure in the history of the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom, a realm nestled in the heart of Africa. His ascent to power unfolded against a backdrop of profound historical changes, as colonial forces began to encroach upon the African continent.

As a leader, Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega faced the challenges of navigating a complex and rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. His reign, which commenced in the late 19th century, coincided with the European scramble for Africa, a period marked by the aggressive pursuit of colonial territories by European powers.

The name Kabaleega is etched in history as a leader who valiantly defended his kingdom, not only in military battles but also through diplomatic means. His efforts to resist colonial incursions and protect the sovereignty of Bunyoro-Kitara left an indelible mark on the collective memory of the region.

His leadership was characterized by a profound sense of duty towards the preservation of the cultural identity of his people. Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega understood that the strength of a kingdom lies not only in its physical boundaries but in the preservation of its unique traditions, customs, and values. His governance was a harmonious blend of the old and the new, where cultural heritage was not a relic of the past but a guiding force for the future.

One of the key aspects of Kabaleega's legacy lies in his resistance against colonial forces during a tumultuous period in African history. In the late 19th century, European powers sought to expand their empires, often at the expense of indigenous peoples. Kabaleega's fierce determination to protect his kingdom from foreign intrusion is a testament to his courage and his commitment to the sovereignty of his people.

The famous battle of Masindi in 1894 stands as a symbol of Kabaleega's resistance against British colonial forces. Despite facing overwhelming odds, he and his warriors displayed incredible valour, demonstrating a determination to defend their land and way of life. Though ultimately defeated, Kabaleega's struggle inspired future generations to resist colonial oppression and fight for self-determination.

Kabaleega's legacy is not only one of resistance but also of diplomacy. He skilfully navigated the complex political landscape of his time, seeking alliances with neighbouring kingdoms to strengthen his position against external threats. His ability to forge strategic alliances showcased his diplomatic acumen and highlighted the importance of collaboration in the face of adversity.

Specific instances abound where Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega's cultural legacy contributed significantly to the well-being of his people. One notable aspect was his emphasis on inclusive governance. In a time when external pressures sought to fragment and divide, he embraced a leadership style that respected the diverse cultural backgrounds within the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom. This inclusivity fostered a sense of unity and solidarity among his people, a testament to the transformative power of cultural leadership.

Additionally, Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega's commitment to education as a cornerstone of cultural preservation stands out. Recognizing that the transmission of cultural values requires an informed and enlightened populace, he championed educational initiatives that empowered his people with knowledge while preserving the traditions that defined them. He understood the

power of knowledge and sought to empower his people through education, fostering an environment where learning and cultural heritage thrived.

This commitment to education was not merely a pragmatic strategy but a profound acknowledgment of the symbiotic relationship between cultural heritage and the intellectual empowerment of a community. Kabaleega's commitment to education and cultural preservation left a lasting impact on the intellectual development of his kingdom.

Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega's leadership was a testament to the profound influence that cultural values can wield in the realm of governance.

Drawing parallels between Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega's leadership and the contemporary need for cultural integration in sustainable development reveals striking similarities. In an era marked by rapid globalization and interconnectedness, the call for cultural integration is more urgent than ever. The challenges we face today—be they environmental, economic, or social—require nuanced solutions that recognize and respect the diversity of cultural perspectives.

Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega's inclusive governance style, which embraced the rich cultural diversity within the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom, serves as a poignant example for leaders grappling with the complexities of modern governance. In our pursuit of the Sustainable Development, we must recognize that cultural integration is not an impediment but an invaluable asset. By weaving together the various threads of cultural diversity, we create a tapestry that is resilient, adaptable, and capable of addressing the multifaceted challenges before us.

Furthermore, the lessons from Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega's legacy extend beyond governance to inspire current leaders and communities in their pursuit of Sustainable Development. His unwavering commitment to education as a means of cultural preservation and empowerment serves as a beacon for those advocating for inclusive and accessible education today. His holistic approach to environmental and economic sustainability, grounded in cultural values, offers a roadmap for communities striving to balance progress with respect for the planet.

The legacy of Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega challenges us to view sustainable development not as a detached set of goals but as a harmonious integration of cultural heritage, environmental stewardship, and economic prosperity. His story underscores the



transformative power of cultural leadership in building resilient communities and fostering a sense of collective purpose.

Kabaleega's unwavering commitment to his people's welfare underscores the paramount importance of servant leadership. Leaders must prioritize the well-being of those they serve, viewing their roles not as positions of authority, but as opportunities to uplift and empower their communities. Kabaleega's legacy challenges us to move beyond self-interest and prioritize the collective needs and aspirations of the people.

In the face of external threats, Kabaleega exemplified resilience and courage. Leaders today can learn from his steadfast determination in protecting the sovereignty of his kingdom. Challenges will inevitably arise, and true leadership is defined by the ability to navigate adversity with courage and resilience. Kabaleega's legacy urges today's leaders to face challenges head-on, undeterred by the enormity of the obstacles before them.

The Battle of Masindi provides a crucial lesson in strategic thinking and adaptability. Kabaleega, facing overwhelming odds, displayed remarkable military acumen and sought strategic alliances. Today's leaders must be adept at strategic planning, capable of adapting to changing circumstances, and fostering collaborations that enhance

their effectiveness. Kabaleega's legacy underscores the importance of foresight and adaptability in leadership.

Diplomacy was a cornerstone of Kabaleega's rule, and leaders today can glean insights from his ability to navigate complex political landscapes. Effective diplomacy involves building relationships, seeking alliances, and understanding the interconnectedness of regional and global dynamics. Kabaleega's diplomatic skills offer a blueprint for leaders to foster partnerships that contribute to the collective advancement of nations.

Kabaleega's emphasis on education as a tool for empowerment remains relevant today. In a world driven by knowledge and innovation, leaders must prioritize education to uplift their societies. By investing in intellectual development and cultural preservation, leaders can create a foundation for sustainable progress. Kabaleega's legacy serves as a reminder that true leadership involves not only addressing immediate challenges but also ensuring the long-term growth and resilience of communities.

Moreover, Kabaleega's story highlights the importance of cultural identity. In a globalized world, leaders must recognize and celebrate the diverse cultural fabric of their societies. Kabaleega's commitment to preserving the cultural heritage of his kingdom

underscores the value of cultural diversity as a source of strength and resilience.

In conclusion, the legacy of Omukama Cwa II Kabaleega offers a timeless and profound guide for contemporary leadership and sustainable development. His life exemplifies the principles of servant leadership, resilience, strategic thinking, and diplomatic acumen—qualities essential for navigating the complexities of our interconnected world. The lessons drawn from Kabaleega's unwavering commitment to the well-being of his people, his ability to face adversity with courage, and his strategic approach to diplomacy and education resonate strongly with the challenges and opportunities of today.

As we strive to achieve the Sustainable Development, Kabaleega's legacy reminds us that progress is not only about meeting specific targets but also about fostering inclusive and sustainable practices deeply rooted in cultural values. His leadership underscores the transformative potential of integrating cultural heritage into governance, education, and environmental stewardship. Moreover, Kabaleega's commitment to cultural diversity challenges us to view our differences not as obstacles but as sources of strength and innovation in the pursuit of a more sustainable and equitable future.

In embracing Kabaleega's legacy, let us recognize that cultural integration is not a luxury but a necessity for achieving the Sustainable development. By respecting and celebrating diverse cultural perspectives, we can design and implement more effective, inclusive, and sustainable solutions. As we navigate the complex waters of contemporary challenges, let Kabaleega's vision inspire leaders and communities alike to weave together the threads of cultural diversity, resilience, and collective purpose. In doing so, we can build a future that honours the past, respects the present, and sustains the prosperity of generations yet to come.

Thank you.