UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

REMARKS BY PROF. PETER M. F. MBITHI, THE VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, DURING THE FIRST AFRICAN SYMPOSIUM ON SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE HELD ON MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2019 AT 9.30 A.M. AT THE CHANDARIA CENTRE FOR PERFORMING ARTS, MAIN CAMPUS
• The distinguished Chair of Wangari Maathai Institute, Prof. Takeuchi – Key Note Speaker
• Hon. Kelemi Mwiria, Former Assistant Minister, Minister of Education – Key note speaker
• The Deputy Vice Chancellors present
• The Senate
• Board of Management of WMI
• Organizers of the symposium
• Eminent Panellists
• The symposium Donors (ADfB, ESDA, Pacja)
• Invited delegates
• Ladies and Gentlemen,
It gives me a great pleasure to receive and welcome you at the University of Nairobi to this symposium on Sustainability Science.

It is a rare opportunity to gather high level decision makers and academicians to exchange views on Africa’s sustainable development concerns, and to interrogate the efforts universities and other stakeholders are putting in place to advance sustainability science initiatives. This symposium comes at a time when Africa is facing acute poverty and destitution, extreme
climate change, food insecurity, water scarcity, overexploitation of natural resources combined with environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity.

This symposium would not have been possible without the support from the various universities and organizations represented here today; including the African Development Bank and the Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Secretariat too for a job well done. My appreciation to the African Development Bank for its continued support especially
for the Education for Sustainable Development in Africa Programs, whose outcome so far has led to the production and management of knowledge, especially through the next generation of researchers, in support of Africa’s sustainable development.

We are gathered here, to share the role of sustainability science - an academic area whose core focus is to address sustainable development challenges of our time, through field-based problem-oriented multi-disciplinary approaches drawn from various academic fields and local knowledge systems. This is well articulated in the UN 2030 Agenda on the SDGs and the AU’s Agenda 2063
on the Africa We Want, that seek to address a range of political, economic, social and environmental challenges facing Africa.

Today, the world is interlinked so that sustainability threats and challenges require everyone to share responsibility and contribute to a common vision, given the slow pace of poverty reduction in Africa, coupled with the lack of inclusiveness of the growth process which has rendered most economies vulnerable to external shocks, thus undermining the sustainability of its growth trajectory.
To respond to these challenges, a number of measures on sustainability science have been employed by the academia to identify horizontal and vertical synergies and integrate global sustainable development frameworks into national development visions. One of the measures is the ESDA Initiative, comprising of three Master’s degree programs namely: Sustainable Integrated Rural Development, Sustainable Urban Development and Management of Mineral Resources, whose goal is to address some of the most critical sustainable development concerns of our continent. These graduate programs together with the Next
Generation Researchers will lead to the transformation of the continents higher education curricula to a more field-based practically oriented focus.

As an engine of development, higher education research and education must address Africa’s changing development demands and address the challenges. African universities have for decades lagged behind in support of sustainable development. This has been occasioned by the decline in real value of university budgets, increase in undergraduates’ intakes, increase
in academic staff turnover, and research facilities deterioration. To improve on the low research output from Africa, accounting for less than 2% of global publications and international scientific research, and high aging population of professors and trainers with very low generational renewal, mainstreaming of sustainability science research and education should drive the transformation and reformation of our universities. We need more research, and a bigger percent of young scholars in our universities to drive the agenda of sustainability science.
At the heart of sustainability science education and research is to promote the creation of knowledge-based economies in Africa, particularly through the catalyzation of education and skills revolution and active promotion of science, technology, research and innovation, to build knowledge, human resource capabilities and skills for the African century. This will require the mapping of interrelationships across the various international agendas to identify areas of convergence and divergence and the use of policy simulation models to estimate intersectoral impact.
I would like to underscore that, incorporating sustainability science in our education systems will bring about newer and innovative mechanisms to leapfrog Africa into the fourth industrial revolution. We need to integrate ICT as a tool for management and quality delivery of sustainability science programs, to further expand south-south inter-university collaboration, and to reach the marginalized masses in the continent. Distance learning, open learning are a few of the ways that ICT can offer cost-effective sharing resources, support quality access to underserved communities, equalize opportunities to learn and
enhance affordability. Partnerships with the industry and policymakers will enhance sustainability science programs.

To conclude, as an interdisciplinary field, sustainability science will play a crucial role in facilitating interventions that foster shared prosperity and reduced poverty while protecting the environment in Africa, drawing from multiple disciplines of the natural, social, and engineering sciences, from the professions, and from practical field experience in business, government, and civil society. I am convinced that incorporating sustainability science in higher education in Africa, will
promote the achievement of not only the global sustainability agenda but also the national development visions of African countries. To this end, at the University of Nairobi, together with our partners, we are working towards establishing the Pan-African Center for Sustainability, to provide a platform for leading researchers in sustainability science, from Africa and beyond, to share, exchange and generate knowledge and innovations in support of sustainable development in Africa. The Center will inspire new approaches to sustainable development by leveraging on the SDGs and
Agenda 2063 as we implement new paths towards sustainability in the continent.

Distinguished Guests

This symposium has brought together close to 600 delegates drawn from various fields. I am informed we have 200 members of Amani clubs from four secondary schools (Thika, Uthiru Girls, Kijabe Boys, Bathi), 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students from many
departments of the UoN, 50 students from KU, and 150 from many public and private sectors, including from UN and NEMA.

All these delegates can initiate and stand to be counted to sustain a momentous change towards sustainability thinking in Africa.
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

In conclusion I take this opportunity to thank all the delegates for finding time to attend this symposium and I am sure the fruitful discussions will enrich you all.

I urge all the stakeholders present to form a working forum to support and promote sustainability science training and research in Africa.
With these many remarks I declare the symposium officially open.

God bless you all.

PETER M.F MBITHI, PhD, EBS
VICE-CHANCELLOR
AND
PROFESSOR OF VETERINARY SURGERY