

# **Towards a New Vision for Africa: Reflections on Dira 2050**

***Keynote Address during the 17<sup>th</sup> Mwalimu Nyerere Intellectual Festival 2026***

By

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University of Dar es Salaam, Friday 29 May 2026

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## **1. Introduction**

It is always a great pleasure to return to the University of Dar es Salaam, my alma mater. I congratulate and commend you for sustaining the tradition of the Mwalimu Nyerere Intellectual Festival as a platform for critical reflection on Africa's future, leadership, development, and liberation.

The name of this Festival fittingly honours Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere — a man of many dimensions: ***an intellectual, a statesman, a philosopher, a teacher, a nationalist, and, not least, an exceptionally gifted politician.*** Few African leaders embodied the unity between thought and action as profoundly as Mwalimu Nyerere.

In a special way, I thank the organisers for inviting me and for according me the honour of delivering this keynote address. I also commend them for selecting Dira 2050 as one of the central themes of this year's Festival. Long-term national visioning is indispensable for transformation, resilience, and dignity in the twenty-first century. Nations that aspire to prosperity and strategic relevance must cultivate the capacity to think beyond the immediacy of electoral cycles and short-term policy horizons.

In this presentation, before addressing the central theme of Dira 2050, I will first reflect on the strategic role of universities in Africa's development project. I will then

discuss Dira 2050, with particular emphasis on Pillar Two: Human Capabilities Development. In conclusion, I will share some insights about the future of Africa in the geopolitical context where multipolarity seems to overtake multilateralism.

## **2. The University and the African Development Project**

Universities are among the most enduring and successful institutions in human civilisation because they have remained faithful to their core mission: *the pursuit of truth*. At their best, universities preserve, generate, and transmit knowledge about human society, life, and the natural world while equipping successive generations with the intellectual tools necessary to advance civilisation.

Furthermore, as observed by Lee Bollinger, following the rapid decline of the traditional press, the university is increasingly emerging as a “fifth branch” of the state — a guardian of freedom of thought, freedom of inquiry, and freedom of expression. In this regard, universities serve as the voice of reason and, at times, the voice of the voiceless. They therefore require protection and autonomy in their fearless pursuit of truth and critical inquiry.

Yet while the pursuit of truth and the advancement of knowledge remain their cardinal responsibilities, universities risk irrelevance if they confine themselves solely to abstract intellectual exercises detached from the lived realities of society. Universities must align knowledge production with the contemporary needs, aspirations, and developmental challenges of their nations.

Indeed, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere was remarkably clear about the role of the university from the earliest days of Tanganyika’s independence. In his address during the opening of the University College of Dar es Salaam in June 1963 — barely twenty months after the inauguration of the Faculty of Law on 25 October 1961 — Mwalimu articulated two foundational principles regarding the role of the university.

First, universities must cultivate critical thinking, original research, and rigorous intellectual debate among both faculty and students. Second, universities must remain responsive to the development aspirations and needs of society.

Universities must therefore maintain a delicate but necessary balance between pursuing knowledge for its own sake and aligning intellectual inquiry with national development goals. As Lee Bollinger aptly observes, “a life with only the desire to know would be arid, but a life without it would be meaningless.”

In summary, universities must reclaim and safeguard their historical role as centres of knowledge production, critical inquiry, and national consciousness. But they cannot afford to remain detached from the development challenges confronting society. Universities must produce not only graduates, but also thinkers, innovators, researchers, nation-builders, and ethical leaders.

Moreover, universities are expected to play a central role in advancing civilisation by championing societal values through sustained critical engagement with the public. This is why the University of Dar es Salaam must continue to serve as a centre of rigorous national debate on matters of public importance. It must remain a space where national and global leaders — whether perceived as “good” or “bad” — are invited, listened to, questioned, and debated. Intellectual institutions lose their relevance the moment they surrender their commitment to open inquiry and critical engagement.

It is within this broader intellectual and developmental context that Dira 2050 must be understood — not merely as a government planning framework, but as a national project requiring the active participation of universities, researchers, innovators, and citizens alike.

### 3. Dira 2050

#### ***Why a National Development Vision?***

Before highlighting the contents of Dira 2050, it is important to answer a fundamental question: why should a country have a long-term national vision?

Such a vision is especially essential for developing countries seeking sustainable, inclusive, and transformative development beyond short-term electoral cycles. It serves as a strategic compass defining where a nation aspires to be within a specified period of time. In essence, it answers a simple but profound question: **what kind of country do we want to become?**

When we began preparing Dira 2050 in 2023, one of the key issues we grappled with was the appropriate time frame. Some members of the drafting team proposed a horizon of fifty to one hundred years, while others preferred twenty to thirty years. After extensive discussions and lessons from international experience, we agreed that the time horizon of a national vision should neither be too short nor too long. Ultimately, we settled on a twenty-five-year framework.

There are several reasons why countries require long-term strategic visions.

First, they provide direction and strategic clarity. They transcend political cycles and create continuity around a shared national destination. They answer fundamental questions such as: What kind of society do we aspire to build? What should be our priorities — industrialisation, human capital development, environmental sustainability, technological advancement, or social inclusion?

Second, they align stakeholders across government, the private sector, development partners, civil society, and citizens. Without a shared framework,

different actors may pull in different directions. A well-articulated vision creates coherence in policies, budgets, programmes, and investments.

Third, they guide prioritisation and resource allocation. Given the scarcity of resources, leaders must make difficult but necessary choices regarding what to prioritise, what to sequence, and what trade-offs to accept. Long-term planning shifts governance from reactive crisis management towards strategic investment in high-impact sectors.

Fourth, a national vision serves as a powerful instrument for mobilising citizens. It inspires national confidence, unity, and collective effort. It gives citizens — especially young people — a sense of purpose and hope regarding the future of their country.

Fifth, long-term visions strengthen accountability and performance measurement. By establishing clear and time-bound targets, they create a framework through which citizens and institutions can monitor progress and evaluate performance.

Sixth, credible long-term frameworks enhance a country's attractiveness to both domestic and foreign investors. They signal seriousness, predictability, stability, and strategic direction.

Indeed, many countries that successfully transformed into middle- and upper-middle-income economies attribute part of their success to sustained strategic planning. In East Asia, countries such as South Korea, Singapore, and China used successive long-term plans to transform from poor agrarian societies into advanced industrial economies. In Africa, countries such as Rwanda, Botswana, Mauritius, and Ghana have similarly demonstrated the value of strategic continuity.

Tanzania itself has valuable experience in long-term national planning through Tanzania Development Vision 2025, launched in 1999. That Vision contributed significantly to achievements in infrastructure development, access to education, macroeconomic stability, and social services.

However, the value of a vision should never be measured by the beauty of the document itself. A vision is only as meaningful as its implementation. Success ultimately depends on political leadership, institutional coordination, realistic targets, citizen participation, and the capacity to adapt to changing global realities. This is precisely how Dira 2050 has been architected.

The bottom line is this: without a long-term strategic vision, countries risk drifting, reacting to crises rather than shaping their future, and missing opportunities for structural transformation. In an increasingly competitive world, a clear, ambitious, and shared vision remains one of the most powerful instruments for turning national potential into national prosperity.

For Tanzania specifically, developing a successor to Vision 2025 became a strategic necessity — a critical step towards achieving faster, more inclusive, and more sustainable progress aligned with the realities and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

### ***Highlights of Dira 2050***

Let me now place a few historical facts into perspective.

In the history of our country, Dira 2050 becomes only the second national development framework formally designated as a “Vision” or Dira. It also differs from earlier national frameworks in that it is conceived primarily as a broad national development compact rather than as an extension of a specific ideological programme.

This does not mean that Tanzania previously lacked strategic direction. Certainly not. Our development trajectory has always been guided by clear national aspirations and policy frameworks.

The Arusha Declaration of 1967, initiated under the leadership of Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, was itself a comprehensive national development

framework that guided Tanzania's development for nearly three decades. During the Second Phase Government under President Hassan Ali Mwinyi, development planning was guided by the Chama Cha Mapinduzi Programme of 1987–2002, later revised into a broader policy orientation framework during the 1990s.

The first official development vision in the modern sense was Tanzania Development Vision 2025, prepared under the leadership of Third Phase President Benjamin William Mkapa. Implementation of Vision 2025 began in 2000 and formally concludes on 30 June 2026. Dira 2050 therefore becomes the second official national development vision since independence and since the formation of the Union.

Dira 2050 sets out an ambitious roadmap for Tanzania's transformation by mid-century. It envisions Tanzania as a prosperous, just, inclusive, and self-reliant nation.

Its overarching aspiration is for ***Tanzania to become an industrialised, knowledge-based, upper-middle-income economy with a one-trillion-dollar economy, a per capita income of approximately US\$7,000, and the eradication of extreme poverty.***

To realise these aspirations, Dira 2050 is organised around a Foundation, three Pillars, and five Drivers of transformation.

The Foundation is the anchor of the Vision. It reinforces the pillars, drivers, and transformative sectors necessary for building a prosperous and inclusive society. Its key attributes include good governance and justice, effective local government institutions, a responsible public service, and enduring peace, security, and stability.

In essence, the Foundation is the glue that binds the entire Vision together. Governance, peace, security, and stability are not merely supporting conditions; they are strategic drivers of long-term development.

Dira 2050 is built upon three strategic pillars.

The first pillar focuses on building a strong, inclusive, and competitive economy capable of creating opportunities for all citizens. It emphasises inclusive growth, industrialisation, productivity enhancement, and decent job creation.

The second pillar centres on human capability development and social transformation. It seeks to ensure that every citizen is equipped to contribute meaningfully to national development while enjoying improved well-being and social protection. Particular attention is given to women, youth, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

The third pillar focuses on environmental sustainability and the conservation of Tanzania's natural resources. It addresses environmental degradation, climate resilience, and sustainable resource utilisation.

To support implementation, Dira 2050 identifies five strategic drivers of transformation: integrated logistics, science and technology, research and development, digital transformation, and energy.

These drivers are not merely supporting sectors; they are the strategic capabilities through which Tanzania will compete, innovate, and transform in the twenty-first century.

Integrated logistics will improve connectivity and reduce the cost of doing business. Science, technology, and innovation will drive productivity and competitiveness across sectors. Research and development will generate locally relevant knowledge and evidence-based solutions. Digital transformation will accelerate efficiency, innovation, and service delivery. Energy, meanwhile, will remain the backbone of industrialisation and economic transformation.

Together, these drivers will accelerate socio-economic transformation, raise productivity, and improve the quality of life of all Tanzanians.

Over the next twenty-five years, Dira 2050 seeks to address eight major development challenges:

- i) Rapid population growth and urbanisation, which are increasing pressure on land, water, infrastructure, housing, employment, and social services. A young population is not automatically a demographic dividend. Without education, productivity, and jobs, it can equally become a demographic burden;
- ii) Low productivity across key sectors of the economy;
- iii) Human capital and skills limitations;
- iv) Infrastructure gaps in energy, transport, logistics, and technology;
- v) Challenges related to the business environment and investment climate;
- vi) Limited domestic financial resources for development financing;
- vii) Institutional weaknesses, governance challenges, and the need for mindset transformation; and
- viii) Limited investment in science, technology, innovation, and data systems.

Addressing these challenges effectively will determine whether Tanzania succeeds in achieving the aspirations of Dira 2050 and securing prosperity for future generations.

Let me reflect briefly on ***Pillar Two: Human Capabilities and Social Development***, where you belong.

Dira 2050 places human capability development at the centre of sustained economic growth and social transformation. The focus is on building a healthy, skilled, and productive population capable of driving national progress.

The Vision prioritises investment in five strategic areas: education, health, water and sanitation, social protection, and inclusive services.

Particular emphasis is placed on expanding access to higher education while maintaining quality. The target is to ensure that at least fifty percent of secondary school graduates transition into higher education through expanded investment in universities, technical colleges, and open learning centres.

Dira 2050 also places strong emphasis on building world-class research institutions, strengthening STEM and digital competencies, promoting interdisciplinary learning, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, and enhancing the international competitiveness of Tanzanian universities.

#### **4. Conclusion: Towards a New Vision for Africa**

There is no doubt that Africa is rising. The evidence is increasingly visible in the continent's demographic dynamism, expanding markets, technological adaptation, natural resource endowment, and growing intellectual confidence.

Africa is no longer merely a subject of global development discourse. It is increasingly becoming an active force in shaping the future of the world economy and global civilisation itself.

As Jeffrey Sachs and many contemporary scholars have repeatedly argued, Africa will play a central role in the future trajectory of global economic development because it possesses the youngest population in the world, vast strategic resources, and immense untapped productive potential.

Yet Africa will not become a global powerhouse by historical inevitability or by grace alone. The future must be consciously built.

History teaches us that nations rise when they develop the institutional capacity, technological capability, productive systems, and strategic vision necessary to transform their societies. Africa's rise will therefore depend on deliberate choices, disciplined leadership, and sustained investment in people, ideas, and productive capabilities.

To realise its full potential, Africa's transformation must be anchored on knowledge creation, scientific advancement, productivity growth, industrialisation, innovation, Pan-African cooperation, and strategic self-confidence.

We must move from being exporters of raw materials to creators of value; from consumers of imported technologies to producers of innovation; and from fragmented economies to integrated regional markets capable of competing globally.

At the same time, the implementation of Dira 2050 and similar long-term visions across Africa will unfold within an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment.

The world is undergoing profound transformations characterised by declining influence and role of multilateral institutions, strategic competition among major powers, technological rivalry, shifting trade patterns, climate change, energy transition, debt pressures, supply-chain reconfiguration, and growing global insecurity.

Conflicts in different parts of the world continue to generate economic shocks through disruptions in trade, finance, energy markets, food systems, and investment flows. These realities remind us that national development can no longer be separated from global geopolitical dynamics.

For Tanzania and Africa more broadly, this changing global order presents both risks and opportunities. It requires strategic pragmatism, economic resilience, diversification of partnerships, and stronger domestic productive capacity.

It also demands that African countries strengthen regional integration and speak with greater unity and confidence in global affairs. In an era of geopolitical fragmentation, nations that succeed will be those capable of protecting their strategic interests while remaining adaptive, innovative, and institutionally strong.

In this transformation, universities have a historic responsibility.

Institutions of higher learning must become engines of modernisation, centres of critical thinking, incubators of innovation, and architects of Africa's developmental future. They must not remain isolated ivory towers detached from the productive sectors of society.

Instead, they must actively contribute to solving the continent's challenges in agriculture, manufacturing, energy, digital technology, governance, health, and environmental sustainability.

For Tanzania, Dira 2050 represents part of this broader African awakening. It is not simply a planning document; it is a national commitment to structural transformation, human development, productivity, competitiveness, resilience, and inclusive prosperity.

Its success will depend not only on government action, but also on the active participation of universities, intellectuals, the private sector, civil society, and citizens themselves.

The task before us is therefore both national and continental. We are called upon to imagine boldly, think strategically, and act decisively.

Africa's future will not be determined elsewhere. It will be determined in our universities, in our institutions, in our industries, and in the quality of leadership we cultivate across generations.

It will be determined by the strength of our ideas, the courage of our people, the effectiveness of our states, and the confidence with which we define our place in the world.

Effective state capacity is built when there is broad societal agreement on long-term national priorities towards which the resources and institutions of the state must be directed.

Such agreement becomes possible when the state itself remains cohesive and when society continuously engages in productive exchanges of ideas concerning the responsibilities of government, citizens, markets, and institutions in the development process.

It is precisely for this reason that universities remain indispensable in national transformation. Institutions such as the University of Dar es Salaam must continue to

serve as platforms for intellectual engagement, policy reflection, civic dialogue, and the contestation of ideas necessary for building national consensus and strategic direction.

Societies that cease to debate ideas eventually lose the capacity to shape their own future.

I therefore once again commend the organisers of the Mwalimu Nyerere Intellectual Festival for sustaining this important national tradition and for creating a space where scholars, policymakers, students, and citizens can collectively reflect on the future of Tanzania, Africa, and the wider world.

The twenty-first century can indeed become Africa's century — but only if Africans themselves choose to build it.

I thank you for your attention.