



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

CITATION ON

THE LATE DR. LAWRENCE G. SAGINI

ON HIS CONFERMENT OF

THE HONORARY DOCTORATE OF LETTERS

(D.LITT)

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

AT

NAIROBI, KENYA,

ON

11TH DECEMBER, 1995

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EAST AFRICANA COLLECTION

CITATION ON

THE LATE HON. DR. LAWRENCE GEORGE SAGINI
BA (Allegheny), Hon. LLD., Allegheny EGH

The Late Hon. Dr. Lawrence George Sagini was born of Mwabogonko clan, a doubly precious first son of Mzee Ndemo Kibagendi and Mama Esther Nyanganyi Ndemo and eldest grandson of Kibagendi with the first of his ten wives, on 1st January 1926 at Ikuruma village , Eronge Division, now known as Marani Division of Kisii District.

Dr. Sagini's education effectively started in his early childhood at the classroom of his grandfather Kibagendi, himself a leader of the Kitutu people when the British arrived, and a Gusii elder that became a judge in the traditional law courts in colonial times. A combination of the circumstances of his birth and Abagusi culture gave little Sagini the privilege to sit with his dotting grandfather in his main hut where elders gathered to eat, transact business, discuss matters of family and state, and tell stories including those of their ancestry and customs. This experience evidently anchored the child Sagini solidly in the

knowledge, wisdom and values of his people well before he saw the inside of what most of us consider school.

Being young at the historical watershed for the Kenyan people, Sagini had the added advantage that his father Ndemo came to value what was the white man's education and sent his son to school with the conviction that "we must learn a lot from the white man. He knows how to fly in the sky and cure diseases." Lawrence Sagini first went to Kioge School where he learned to read and write before proceeding to Sengera School for the beginning of a vigorous educational career. In spite of all the hardships of the time, walking six miles to and from school and staying without lunch, Sagini successfully took the Common Entrance Examination and became one of the only two pupils from Sengera School to proceed to Kisii Government School in 1942. Two years later he took the Kenya African Preliminary Examination which he passed well enough to earn a scholarship to Mangu High School where he studied between 1945 and 1948. From Mangu, he proceeded to Kagumo College in Nyeri from where he graduated with a Teachers Diploma in 1949.

Time and other attractions failed to quench his thirst for education so he kept working towards admission to University. He sat and passed Cambridge School Certificate in 1948. In 1957 Sagini received a Scholarship from the Institute of International Education which enabled him to attend Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, in U.S.A. There, his determination and brilliance made him do a four year course in two years, graduating in 1959 with a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree having studied Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, History and Sociology in which he majored.

Lawrence Sagini served this country, first and foremost as a teacher and an Educationist. Before his University education, he taught Maths, History, English and Kiswahili at Nyabondo Intermediate School where he also rose to be headmaster. In 1953-1954 he was a Senior Tutor at Asumbi Teachers Training College. Between 1954 and 1957 he was the Headmaster of Amasango Intermediate School. With his degree from Allegheny College, Lawrence went straight back to his teaching career at Asumbi Teachers College for a brief stint. Sagini had already distinguished himself at this time, and he was therefore propelled to the office of Educational Officer from 1960 to 1961.

While a teacher and an educationist, Sagini demonstrated early that he was never a single track narrow minded personality even in terms of his career. As early as when he was the headmaster of Amasango intermediate School, his acumen for public service had been recognized, and he concurrently began to serve as a member of his Kitutu location Council.

Sagini the politician began to emerge here, as the teacher began to build his political base in locations beyond Kitutu. It is a recognized fact of his personal history that in fact, Sagini was already heading for being a member of The African District Council (ADC) when he decided instead to proceed to America for further studies., However, in 1961, he was not only well educated but also mature and ready to properly start a political career. After the first Kenya Constitutional Conference in Lancaster House in 1960, there was to be a general election and a sort of coalition government as part of the general preparation for Kenya's independence. For those elections, scheduled for February 1961, there was to be only one elected representative for the whole of Kisii land. In the first such election in our land, Lawrence Sagini did not only stand and win to become the first elected Kisii representative in the then Legislative

Council, but also distinguished himself as a politician with class: with the Giraffe as his symbol during the elections, he endeared himself to the people by eloquently and sincerely telling his electorate : "twiga never hurt anyone, he is tall and graceful like me. Now we will stop eating from the ground and feed on the tender leaves at the top."

Being a member of the Legislative Council between 1961 and 1963 had just the sort of challenges that were needed to bring out the special gifts of Lawrence Sagini. The high and volatile political temperature predicated not only on African nationalism but also on the sensitive issue of racism required just what Sagini had: both traditional and western type education; eloquence in local languages, English and Kiswahili, vision and courage to follow it on principled basis; integrity and dignity radiated and recognisable both by one's own illiterate people as well as the European (British) colonialist; precision and honesty of purpose; and particularly relevant for politics, multilingual eloquence that had to stun both friend and foe into listening as well as convince the unbeliever to see the truth for what it is.

The second Lancaster House conference was a critical milestone in Kenya's history. Lawrence Sagini was one of the great sons of Kenya that ably participated selflessly in that Conference and thereby laid the solid foundation of our nation and motherland Kenya.

It is neither an accident nor sheer luck that Lawrence Sagini's political career spells success inspite of challenges of various times: in his first tour in the legislative body, Sagini became the Minister for Education between 1962 and 1963, This made him the first African to hold that Ministry. Anyone who knows the history of education in Kenya can imagine the challenges of management, funding, racial integration, and general planning that faced Sagini. He had the philosophy, the stature and the sincere pragmatism it required to handle the matters within and without Kenya and thereby averted crises. He got elected to represent Kitutu West to Kenya's first parliament in 1963 and become Minister for Land Schemes, Fisheries, Water and Natural Resources. His personal understanding and appreciation of environmental matters preceded the recent global awareness as he had this to say as early as then: "The natural resources of this country, its wild-life, ... the beautiful places

in which these animals live, the mighty forest which guard the water catchment areas so vital to the survival of man and beast, are a priceless heritage for the future." He went ahead on behalf of the Kenya government to pledge the preservation of the environment and called upon lovers of nature to support his ministry with funds. This showed a man a decade ahead of the world awareness as manifested in the 1st World Conference on Environment in 1972 in Stockholm. Being a practical person with vision, Sagini did not just call for the preservation of the environment but also worked at improving the resource. For instance, he started a fisheries development , making use of the many waters of Kenya in an effort to help enhance the availability of protein to the people. In 1964 Sagini moved to the Ministry of Local Government. With his education and educational background, Sagini set out to educate local government councillors through a series of seminars funded by Israel - this was insight which properly heralded the reforms that were deemed necessary if not inevitable, such as africanization and the controlled strict management of finances. Part of the political greatness radiated by Sagini was ironically in the philosophical way in which he survived the loss of his parliamentary seat in 1969. It is no wonder that Dr. Sagini's

parliamentary and political career survived all, coming full swing again when politics was really volatile in 1992, and he was nominated back to parliament where he served with dedication till his death.

Dr. Lawrence Sagini was not only an educationist and a politician, he was a public servant in all senses of the term. Both while in and out of the mainstream of Kenya politics, Sagini remained a public human resource that served in many private and public capacities: He was the Chairman of many important Boards such as Maize and Produce Board, Kenya Power and Lighting Company, Agricultural Development Corporation and particularly relevant, the University of Nairobi Council. He was a Director or member of many Boards such as Kenyatta University College, Securicor, James Finlay, Edelville House for the Deprived, East African Industries, and Kenchic. Recognizing his abilities, he served in several Public Committees and Commissions too. In recognition of his distinguished contribution to the Kenyan Society he was decorated with the Elder of the Order of the Golden Heart of Kenya.

Outlining his career, and enumerating the bodies and offices in which Dr. Lawrence Sagini served Kenya does not do enough justice to the man the University of Nairobi proposes to honour, because many other people have served with him. We propose to honour Dr. Sagini because of who he came to be and because of what he was that helped him contribute to many aspects of Kenya's development. We particularly want to recognize his contribution to development of education in general and University education in particular.

Thus, we propose to honour a very educated Kenyan that was bestowed with a high powered intellect. Those who associated with Dr. Sagini know that he read avidly, craved for knowledge widely and became comfortable in all kinds of scientific and intellectual domains. His appointment as Chairman of University of Nairobi Council was therefore particularly appropriate. It was his practice, for example, that before he chaired any of the professorial appointment of the University of Nairobi, he would read around the subject so that he would be able to discharge his duties as Chairman from an informed viewpoint. Indeed that result is that such interviews become live with intellectual as well as practical aspects of the

subject with a chairman academically comfortable whether it was Philosophy, Gynaecology, Agriculture or linguistics. Dr. Sagini was a general intellectual, interviewing specialized intellectuals.

We honour a Philosopher and a cultural Anthropologist. From his reading and from his experience with life, Dr. Sagini had a vivid understanding of life, concomitant convictions and appreciation of the various human cultures that helped create in him a personality that fitted in all the roles he played and radiated understanding which provided controls and constraints in the most difficulty of times. A man at peace with himself, he was able to appease individuals, meetings and situations in turbulence. His sense of humour was a manifestation of, as well as an instrument, for this. His wit, predicated on intelligence, wide reading and experience supported this.

We propose to honour a teacher and an educationist who shared his deep and wide knowledge, not only in class, but in the wider classroom of life - counselling and advising all that needed it, and teaching by example.

We propose to honour a father, who even practiced his profession on his own children , taking each of his six children through the old Durell to make them all professional graduates inspite of his busy schedule serving the public.

Today, the University of Nairobi proposes to honour Lawrence Sagini albeit posthumously, for his exemplary contribution to the development of University education in Kenya and his dedication to peaceful coexistences and sustainable reconciliation. A man who in his life was the embodiment and by example, the published volumes of what the world as a whole and Kenya in particular needs.

We propose to honour a nationalist who served his country in difficult political offices, and times, with incorruptible dedication, steadily but humbly shared and radiated his vision to the extent that he could not die with his philosophies and ideas, or indeed the contributions he made to the development and well being of Kenya.