

# CONFERENCE BULLETIN

## THE INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY (IMLD) CONFERENCE



### UPCOMING EVENTS

❖ 14th Multidisciplinary International Conference  
13<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> May 2020

### Inside

Rich cultural diversity depicted during the IMLD Conference at MMUST



### *Message from the Director DCCM*



The just ended International Mother Language Day Conference has brought into sharp focus the beauty and diversity of our mother languages. It has also sounded an alarm regarding the future of our mother languages. Researchers have said that some of our languages are likely to be eaten up or killed if we do not take action now.

Clearly, it is time to embrace our rich heritage through research, documentation of languages, writing of dictionaries in these languages, performing and reciting traditional poetry. Let us celebrate our dances, our cultural products, our people, our institutions, and yes- ourselves!

We are delighted to present to you the International Mother Language Day (IMLD) 2020 Conference Bulletin. Enjoy your reading...

**Dr. Lydia Anyonje,**  
Directorate of Corporate Communications and Marketing,  
Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology



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Language is the foundation of communication. MMUST looks forward to do more research in linguistics.

Prof. Charles Mutai, DVC PRI



Indigenous languages matter for peace building. This conference reminds us of our unique cultural diversities.

Dr. Patrick Ojera, DVC A&F



This is a special conference that addresses importance of mother languages and endangered languages.

Dr. Eng. Bernadette Sabuni DVC ASA



We celebrate the mother language day for it has brought us to where we are today.

Rev. Prof. Judith Achoka Director, DRPS

“This conference offers us a platform to speak our mother languages, preserve cultural identity and promote cohesion. It is therefore significant to embrace our diversities and cultural uniqueness that discerns our domains from others. Consequently, MMUST looks forward to carry out more research in Languages,”



# MMUST Partners with the County government of Kakamega, UNESCO, Longhorn, Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL) in commemoration of the International Mother Language Day (IMLD)

By Linet Owuor [lowuor@mmust.ac.ke](mailto:lowuor@mmust.ac.ke)



world thereafter the African Union (AU) marked the day a global time to honour the indigenous languages. It was a good opportunity for the University to embrace everyone's culture and mother language as every speaker who took to the podium shared greetings with the rest of the audience in their mother tongues. Different dances that depicted diverse cultures formed the entertainment session.

Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) exhibited its rich cultural diversity and research expertise as it joined the rest of the world to celebrate the Mother Language Day on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2020.

Through the department of Language and Literature Education, the School of Arts and Social Sciences and the Directorate of Research and Post Graduate Support, the University held a three-day conference from 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> February, 2020 culminating into the IMLD celebrations on the last day. The theme of the conference was ***'Indigenous Languages matter for Development, Peace Building and Reconciliation.'***

*"This conference offers us a platform to speak our mother languages thus preserve cultural identity and promote cohesion amongst us. It is therefore significant to embrace our diversities and cultural uniqueness that discerns our domains from others. Consequently, MMUST looks forward to take many researches in Languages," Prof. Asenath Sigot.*

MMUST Samburu student entertaining the audience during IMLD Conference

Speaking during the conference, the Acting Vice Chancellor Prof. Asenath Sigot acknowledged the partners that came together to ensure success of the day.

The partners included, the County government of Kakamega, United Nations Educational, and Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL) and Longhorn. "This conference offers us a platform to speak our mother languages thus preserve cultural identity and promote cohesion amongst us. It is therefore significant to embrace our diversities and cultural uniqueness that discerns our domains from others. Consequently, MMUST looks forward to take many researches in Languages," said Prof. Sigot.

The other scholars of the University who graced the event were Deputy Vice Chancellor, Planning, Research and Innovation Prof. Charles Mutai, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic and Students' Affairs Dr. Eng. Bernadette Sabuni, Deputy Vice Chancellor Administration and Finance Dr. Ojera, Professor of Education Prof. John Shiundu, Registrar Academics Prof. Thomas Sakwa, Director of Research and Post Graduate Support Prof. Judith Achoka, Director of Corporate Communications and Marketing Dr. Lydia Anyonje, and Dean school of Arts and Social Sciences Dr. Perez Wenje, and Chairperson of the department of Language and Literature Education, Dr. Rose Auma.

This event was initiated by Mother Language lovers of the



According to Prof. Jane Ngala Akinyi Oduor a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Languages from the University of Nairobi, documentation of language is key as it enhances accountability during research when references are made. It also preserves many cultural aspects that may be important to the coming generations. Documentation of languages can be done digitally through the websites and other sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Among the key issues addressed during the conference were Social media and mother language.



MMUST Samburu students attending the IMLD Conference



**Prof. Thomas Sakwa**

The Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology Registrar Academics speaking during the International Mother Language Day Conference.

Social media plays a vital role in the preservation of the mother language by providing a space to people who share the same mother language to exchange their values and culture.

Kiswahili having been categorized as one of the mother languages, was recognized as one of the indigenous languages that have been used widely across East Africa to build peace and unite Africans.



The flagging off of the Kakamega IMLD walk by the Kakamega County CEC of Labour, Social Services Youths Sports and Culture Mr. Robert Kundu Makhanu and the MMUST DVC PRI and DVC A&F, Prof. Charles Mutai and Dr. Patrick Ojera respectively



Participants of the International Mother Language Day Conference walk to mark the apex of IMLD Conference.



A matende cultural group dancer performing during the IMLD Conference



# ‘Language without borders’ shapes the conversation during the MMUST’s IMLD conference.

“Language is a resource which can harness wealth if well managed. If not well managed it can create disaster,”

these were the words of Prof. Kenneth Inyani Simala (pictured),

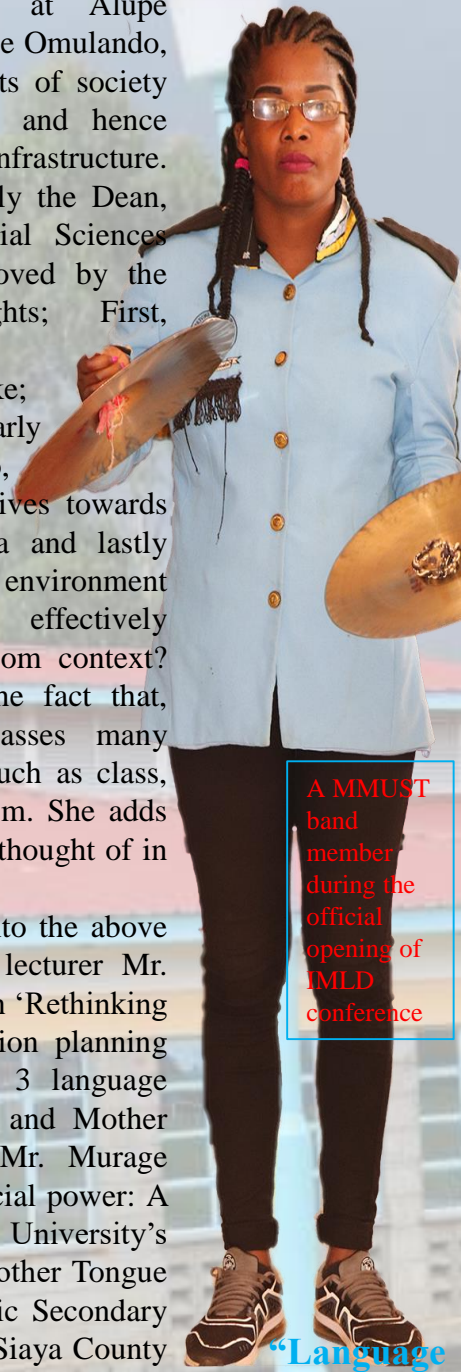
the Executive Secretary of the East African Kiswahili Commission. The highly decorated scholar was speaking during the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of a three day International Mother Language Day Conference at the Main Catering Unit (MCU) in Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Alluding to the fact that Kiswahili is a Pan African language of identity, Prof. Simala said that one can be independent but unless the mind is decolonized, he or she can do very little. He further confirmed that International Mother Language day will not be effective if other languages were excluded.

It was a forum that saw linguistics scholars across the globe converge at in MMUST for an International Mother Language Day Conference from Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2020. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sponsored the event organized by the Languages and Literature Education (LLE) Department in the School of Arts and Social Sciences. The IMLD conference was themed ‘Indigenous Languages Matter for Development, Peace Building and Reconciliation,’ and brought together different stakeholders including; the County government of Kakamega, Ministry of youth, gender, sports and culture, Longhorn Publishers and the Bible Translation and Literacy Society of Kenya; where diversity of language was spotlighted.

During her opening Remarks, Masinde Muliro University Acting Vice Chancellor Prof. Asenath Sigot, applauded the move by the organizers to have MMUST host this global function spearheaded by Dr. David Barasa from LLE department, stating that the theme resonates well with the current Building Bridges Initiative(BBI) conversation in Kenya.

Among the issues that generated debate was ‘Language Education, Gender and Politics’. According to Associate Professor of English Language Education at Alupe University College, Prof. Caroline Omulando, language is central to all aspects of society shaping all social interactions and hence considered as a communicative infrastructure. Prof. Omulando who is currently the Dean, School of Education and Social Sciences observes that, we must be moved by the following propelling thoughts; First, preparing teachers for culturally responsive pedagogic contexts like; teaching of mother language in early years of education in Kenya. Two, changing our teachers’ perspectives towards indigenous languages in Kenya and lastly asking ourselves, which learning environment can mother language embrace effectively within a multi-cultural class room context? Prof. Omulando agrees with the fact that, identity in language encompasses many elements apart from language such as class, religion, ethnicity and nationalism. She adds that, identity and society can be thought of in isolation.

Other researchers who delved into the above discussion included MMUST lecturer Mr. Robinson Oduma who focused on ‘Rethinking a workable language- in-education planning Model in Kenya’ proposing a 3 language model that is English, Swahili and Mother tongue; Laikipia University’s Mr. Murage Joseph looked into ‘Coercive social power: A boomerang in Motion’, Turkana University’s Akinyi Eunice presenting on ‘Mother Tongue Use and Learning Lags in Public Secondary Schools in Rarieda Sub-county, Siaya County of Kenya’ marked the climax of the International Mother Language Day on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2020 being the final day of the conference with a procession in Kakamega town. It was a day for all communities in Kakamega to speak their vernacular. The peak of the IMLD conference was a cultural performance extravaganza at the graduation square of the University. UNESCO has observed this day for the past 20 years.



A MMUST band member during the official opening of IMLD conference

“Language is a resource which can harness wealth if well managed. If not well managed it can create disaster,”



# IMLD Conference Tackles Alarming Rate of Language Endangerment in Kenya

By Awuor Sandra Dorcas

Kenyans could be on the brink of losing their mother languages altogether, researchers at the IMLD conference held at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology from 19<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> February 2019 have revealed. Dr. Atichi Alati of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), gave a presentation on the vitality of multilingual contexts, focusing on a dialect of Luhya known as 'Lunyore'. In his paper, Dr. Atichi calls for research and documentation of the endangered world languages to ensure revitalization of the endangered languages, particularly those regarded as mother tongues.

The Ag. Deputy Vice Chancellor in charge of Planning, Research and Innovation (PRI) at MMUST, Prof. Charles Mutai commended the kind of research presented by the scholars. He encouraged scholars to participate in more research activities and come up with proposals to win grants from the National Research Fund (NRF). The presentations culminated into a fruitful and extensive discussion, mainly focusing on language endangerment, maintenance and revitalization.

"A language is considered safe if the children are able to speak it for the next 100 years," this is according to a citation from R. Masinde and Dr. David Barasa. Their research paper also stated that most millennials are young parents who hardly know their native language, thereby increasing chances of language endangerment.

**"A language is considered safe if the children are able to speak it for the next 100 years,"**

A case in point is the potential endangerment of the Taita language, which is not being used in home settings. This is according to Elizabeth Masaka's research paper on language endangerment; The case of Taita. The paper discloses that the Taita people are less enthusiastic about their language. Most of them complain about it being difficult and valueless. Consequently, parents have despaired of teaching children the language.

The participants drawn from various institutions of higher learning, presented papers on the six sub themes of the conference including Language maintenance; language technology and communication; sociology of language; language, education, gender and politics; language and literature; mother language and sustainable development.



Researchers following presentations during the IMLD Conference at MMUST

According Dr. Nabeta of Kaimosi Friends University College, the Maragoli youth in Uriri Sub County have been using strategies like speaking Lullogoli at home, listening to Lullogoli radio broadcasts, learning from parents and guardians at home among other strategies to keep their language alive. She presented a paper titled 'An Investigation of Language Maintenance Strategies among the Maragoli Youth of Uriri Sub-County, Kenya'. Dr. Nabeta noted the significant role mass media and technology play in the preservation and spread of a language to other speakers.



A group of Samburu students entertaining the audience during the IMLD conference.

The International Mother Language Day (IMLD) Conference Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), drew participation from scholars, publishers and stakeholders in the field of Language, Linguistics, Literature, Communication, and Political Science.



From left, the Ag. Vice Chancellor, Prof. Asenath Sigot and the Kakamega County CEC of Labour, social Services, Youths, Sports and Culture follow proceedings of entertainment at the MMUST graduation square



# Afrocentrism, eco naming and cultural hybridity feature strongly during the international mother language conference at MMUST

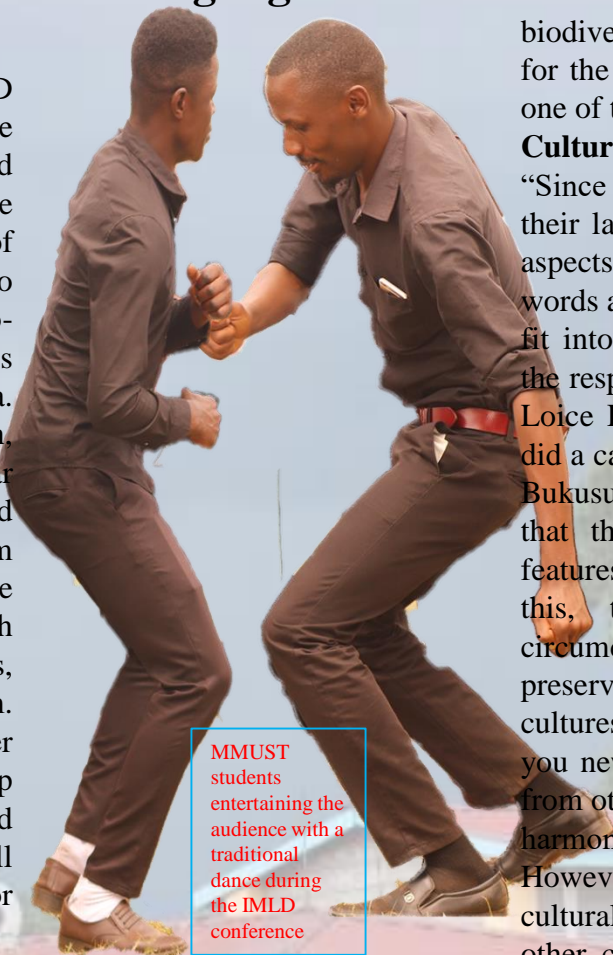
**By Wambugu Mary Wangari**

Researchers at the IMLD Conference held at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), have advised that promoting the use of an Afrocentric approach to sustainable development, eco-naming and cultural hybridity is the way to go for Africa. Speaking during the convention, Jeremiah Muneeni, a scholar from Kenyatta University, said that Africans are suffering from double-consciousness, a state that makes them struggle with two (2) identities, that is, Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism. Research has shown that mother tongue has the ability to develop one's critical thinking and literacy skills, among others, all which are very crucial for sustainable development.

"During colonisation, there was a deliberate linguistic alienation in Africa which resulted in people losing confidence in their own language," he said. He added that there have been attempts by Governments, creative writers and critics to make Africans uphold their culture. "Among other countries, South Africa has recognised about eleven (11) of its languages as official."

Muneeni's paper, therefore, identifies language as a unit of culture and it aims at contributing to the on-going debate with regards to the language that Africans should adopt for their interactions that exonerates them from 'othering' their own culture.

In another paper titled *'The role of indigenous Eco naming system in mitigating overexploitation of wildlife species and habitat loss'*, M.W. Wakoko and B.A. Mudogo, from Kibabii University and MMUST respectively, said that eco-naming resulted in the attribution of more importance to the environment or ecosystem. The two scholars focused on the Bukusu and the Kabras of Western Kenya, two (2) indigenous societies that cherished different plants and animals by naming new-borns after them. By doing so, the ecosystem earned a special place and was therefore regarded with great respect. "The use of Eco naming system could be one of the cheapest means in mitigating disruption of the ecological processes essential in maintaining long-term



MMUST students entertaining the audience with a traditional dance during the IMLD conference

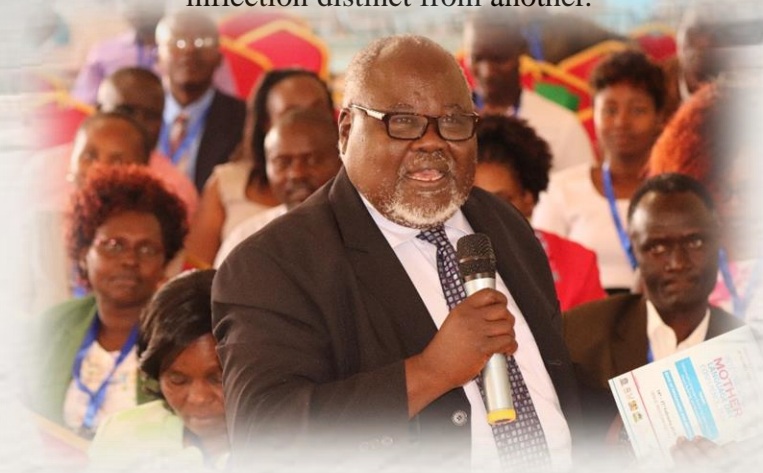
biodiversity. Development without a regard for the environment is not sustainable," said one of the scholars.

## Cultural Hybridity

"Since language is dynamic, people enrich their languages by adopting some linguistic aspects from others, and as a result, new words are being invented and incorporated to fit into the social communicative aspect of the respective recipient languages," says one Loice Khaecha. Eunice Nafula of MMUST, did a case study of about three (3) traditional Bukusu circumcision songs and found out that the community had borrowed some features from other languages. In spite of this, the researcher noticed that the circumcision ceremony has remained preserved hence came to a conclusion that cultures can co-exist. "Co-existence gives you new knowledge and the ability to learn from other people, therefore creating cultural harmony," she stated.

However, some communities have lost their cultural identities because of intrusion from other cultures. "The Abagusii circumcision song (Esimbore), sung to boys after the initiation process, is slowly losing its meaning and value due to Christian influence and modernization," says a scholar from Turkana University College, Gilbert Nyakundi.

In their presentations, scholars shed light on the various morphological and phonological processes that loanwords undergo before they are integrated in the recipient language. The function of these processes is to make words easier to pronounce or more salient to the listener, and to make one word or inflection distinct from another.



Prof. John O. Shiundu asking a question during plenary session at the IMLD Conference. Prof Shiundu is the Professor of education.



# Linguists at the International Mother Language Day (IMLD) Conference demystify the perception of ‘Mother Language’

By Shiundu Wilberforce and Linet Owuor  
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Dr. Fridah Miruka

Mother language has often been misinterpreted and misunderstood to mean the language of the mother. This is not the case according to renowned linguistic researchers at the International Mother Language Day conference (IMLD) at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology.

What is a Mother Language? There is need to demystify the notion of mother language. Scholars say that it is not necessarily what the mother speaks.

Dr. Fridah Miruka, a lecturer at the department of Languages and Literature (LLE), defines the mother language in her paper ‘*Kiswahili from National to Mother Language*’ to mean, the language of the native land where one is born. It is also the language that one learns first and uses it for communication. The findings from her paper show that Kiswahili is currently not only used as a National language but also a mother language to many Kenyans.



(Pictured)  
Mr. Shadrack  
Opunde,  
Kiswahili  
researcher and  
lecturer in the  
MMUST  
department of  
Languages and  
Literature (LLE),  
following  
presentations  
during the IMLD  
Conference

Mr. Shadrack Opunde, the Kiswahili researcher and lecturer in the department of Languages and Literature (LLE), agrees to the definition of the mother language to mean the first language one interacts with; the language of the catchment area. In his paper ‘*Nafasi ya Lugha ya Mama katika Mtaala wa Umilisi katika Shule za Chekechea nchini Kenya*,’ which he presented in perfect Kiswahili, he points out that mother language has been recognized as one of the basic languages to be taught in the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) right from nursery schools. The only challenge has been the lack of teaching materials and facilities. The paper is challenge to policy makers to develop materials in mother languages to make CBC more effective and inclusive.

Mother language is not necessarily the language that the mother speaks. It is the language that one learns first and uses it for communication.

In families where both parents do not share a common mother language, their children will be raised speaking Kiswahili as a common language uniting them thus, Kiswahili becomes the mother language. Kiswahili is similarly used by people living along the Kenyan borders for example in Busia, where there is no shared mother language. People living in towns and cities in Kenya have also embraced Kiswahili as their mother language. Kiswahili has therefore moved from being a National language to a mother language.

Mother language is critical therefore there is the need to preserve it. We do not learn Mother Language because of tribal affiliations, it has taken the lead in peace building and unity in our society



# Researchers call for use of mother language to protect the environment

**By Daudi Kioko**

Researchers at the just concluded International Mother Language Day Conference have called for use of mother language to protect the environment.

Speaking during the Mother Language Conference held at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kinyua Njagi from Chuka University gave an example of how the Kikuyu artists have used their creativity and prowess to highlight several issues relating to conserving and protecting the environment.

‘It can be clearly stated that mother language is very conscious of the environment. Use of these languages helps us to know the beauty and benefits of protecting it. By using our own native languages, we will be able to explain how the environment can be harsh to all living creatures if not well taken care of,’ said Kinyua.

Kinyua gave an example of Kikuyu artists such as the late John De Mathew and the Late Joseph Kimaru who used their artistic skills to show the benefits of taking care of the environment.

“The musicians warn that if we cut down trees we suffer as a nation as there will be drought which will lead to inadequate food supply in the country. There will be no water for human and animal consumption,” said the scholar.

The three day conference whose climax was the International Mother Language Day brought together scholars from different institutions who had been invited to give their contributions and present papers on how we can make sure that mother languages do not become extinct.



A MMUST band member, during the official launching of the IMLD conference





# Researchers' findings reveal 'Glatophagic' Indigenous Languages that 'eat' others.

By Lydia Anyonje and Awuor Sandra Dorcas.



**Dr. Kenneth Ngunjiri**

Findings at the recent International Mother Language Day (IMLD) conference at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology have revealed that there are 'Glatophagic' indigenous languages that assimilate or swallow up other languages. Most indigenous languages in Africa are slowly being replaced by other indigenous languages and not foreign languages as popularly assumed. This is according to renowned researcher Dr. Kenneth

Ngunjiri, from the Department of Literature, Linguistics and Foreign Languages at Kenyatta University.

Dr. Rose Auma, a scholar specialized in French and one of the key organizers of the IMLD conference attested to the fact that foreign languages do not necessarily 'eat up' the indigenous languages.

"The fact that I speak French fluently does not mean that my mother language Dholuo has been swallowed up. I speak both languages fluently. In fact one can be fluent in several languages."

She observed that French, English or Kiswahili are also other peoples' mother languages. However, the linguist pointed out that in Kenya, Kiswahili and English are the languages likely to swallow up or eat up the mother languages. This can be attributed to the fact that children are no longer speaking their mother languages. Soon the numbers of speakers of those languages will decrease drastically.

Dr. Ngunjiri, one of the keynote speakers during the 3-day IMLD Conference, said that the phenomenon of language death is alarming and that there is a conglomeration of factors that lead to that. According to him, communities such as the Maasai are often regarded as indigenous and minorities yet they have assimilated other indigenous languages such as Mijikenda, Wata and Terik.

Other killer- languages mentioned are Dholuo and Gikuyu, which have led to the extinction of other languages such as the Suba and Kinare(a dialect of Ogiek) respectively. According to the UN Red Book, despite the large number of Suba people, the *Olusuba* language is on the verge of extinction due to the dwindling numbers of speakers.

"If a language is not being passed down to the younger generation, it is on its way to dying," said Dr. Ngunjiri.

The researcher also mentioned that some indigenous languages also die in friendly environments such as intermarriages. The alarming rate of language death through such factors pose a great threat to language diversity.

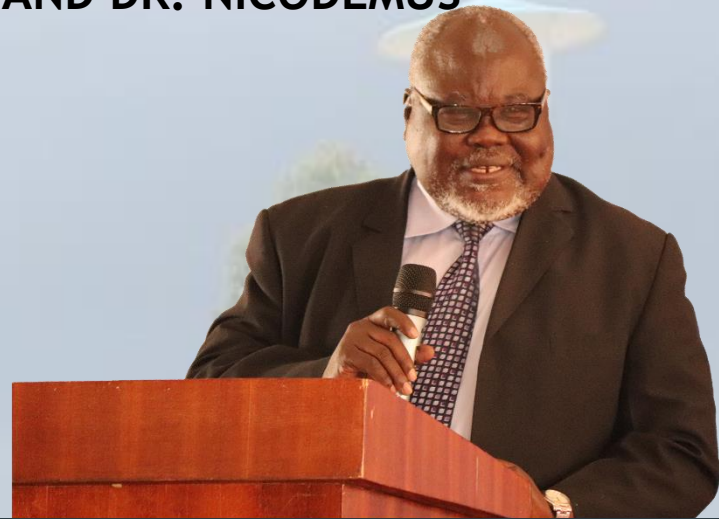
**"The fact that I speak French fluently does not mean that my mother language Dholuo has been swallowed up. I speak both languages fluently. In fact one can be fluent in several languages."**



Dr Rose Auma while addressing the audience during IMLD Conference at MMUST



**PROLIFIC RESEARCHER AND EDUCATION SCHOLAR PROF. JOHN SHIUNDU FETED DURING IMLD CELEBRATIONS AT MMUST ALONGSIDE PROF. PETER BUKHALA AND DR. NICODEMUS NYANDIKO**



**Prof. John O. Shiundu**



**Prof. Peter Bukhala**



**Dr. Nicodemus Nyandiko**



# IMLD CONFERENCE PICTORIAL















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This Bulletin was produced by the Masinde Muliro University  
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The International Mother Language Day (IMLD) Conference