

State University Of Zanzibar

By **PROFESSOR IDRIS RAI**

VICE-CHANCELLOR, STATE UNIVERSITY OF ZANZIBAR



IDRIS RAI

was appointed Vice-Chancellor of SUZA in 2011 at the age of 39. He completed a BA and Masters at Bogazici Bilkent University in Turkey, and earned a PhD in Computer Networks at Telecom ParisTech, France, undertaking postdoctoral studies at Lancaster University in the UK. He then spent four years work at Makerere University before joining SUZA. His mission is to make use of the rich global experience he has accumulated to establish a world-class university in the archipelago.

The idea to establish the State University of Zanzibar (SUZA) was first conceived by the fifth President of Zanzibar, Dr. Salmin Amour Ali, in the mid-1990s in response to the growing need for qualified human capital to spur Zanzibar's socio-economic development. SUZA was officially inaugurated by the archipelago's sixth President, Dr. Karume Aman Karume, in 2001. As the only public university in Zanzibar, SUZA has emerged as an important engine to help transform the country into a middle-class economy.

SUZA has recently carried out major reforms aimed at positioning itself as a world-class university offering quality programs, delivery, and research. The new vision of SUZA, to be the preferred higher education institution for learning and research in the region, builds upon President Ali Mohamed Shein's vision to transform Zanzibar into a regional centre of excellence in higher education. Thanks to strong ongoing support from the Government of Zanzibar and various donors, SUZA is emerging as one of the fastest-growing universities in the region. Student enrolment has increased by almost 300 per cent in the past three years, at a time when most universities in the country are struggling to attract sufficient students. Additionally, the number of programs SUZA offers has increased fourfold.

SUZA's mission is to offer quality and broadly relevant education and research with the aim of developing a knowledge-based society capable of tackling the challenges of the 21st century. The recent increase in the number of programs is necessary to support the government's strategy for economic development. With this in mind, the new programs at SUZA have been identified from relevant priority areas such as Medicine and Health, Tourism, Environmental Sciences, Computing and Information Technologies, and Swahili Studies. Currently, SUZA is composed of five schools: Natural and Social Sciences; Education; Kiswahili and Foreign Languages; Continuing and Professional Education; and Health and Medical Sciences.

Through its reforms, SUZA has identified focus priority areas for learning and research through which we aim to establish regional and global leadership in teaching in the medium and long terms. The primary priority areas include Environmental Sciences and Natural Resources, Oceanography, Swahili Studies, Quality Education, while secondary priority areas are

multi-disciplinary in nature, such as Remote Sensing and GIS, Instructional Technology, and Natural Language Processing.

SUZA has set up two research centres at SUZA to leverage existing institutional capacity and to support development strategies through research: the Tropical Research Centre for Oceanography, Environment and Natural Resources (TROCEN); and the Global Centre for Kiswahili Studies and Advancement (GCKSA).

Swahili has its roots in Zanzibar, making SUZA the logical choice to be the Oxford University of Kiswahili. Our aim is to initiate and support programs to advance global interest in learning and using the language. In addition to GCKSA, various strategies are in place to ensure that SUZA demonstrates its inherent leadership in teaching and research in Swahili studies. In recent years, more than 300 foreign students a year have been enrolling at SUZA to learn Kiswahili through specially tailored immersive programs. We have the first PhD and MA programs in Kiswahili delivered in Swahili by Zanzibari academics from around the world, in addition to BA and Diploma programs. We are in the process of developing a unique BA program in Teaching Kiswahili as a Second Language (TKSOL).

SUZA's development plan includes further expansion of the university to support the national development agenda. New schools in the pipeline include Petroleum Engineering, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Business Studies, Computing, and Communications and Media Studies. In addition, plans are underway to establish an Institute of Policy Studies and Research.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the union between Zanzibar and what was then Tanganyika, SUZA recognises that we live in a global village where physical boundaries are increasingly blurred and in some cases disappearing. We understand the need to develop global citizens who understand cultural diversity and cherish co-existence. Such 21st century skills are required for our graduates to successfully navigate and adapt to an increasingly complex and competitive world.

At the same time, we understand our limitations in developing higher education institutions, recognising the need to partner with experienced institutions to realize our mission. SUZA is now a member of international associations such as ACU, IIE, and IAUP, and is also a member of regional associations such as SARUA, IUCEA, and AICAD.