

Julius Nyerere (1922-1999)

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Description Julius Nyerere was the first President of Tanzania and a tireless champion of African and Third World unity. Known as Mwalimu or teacher in Swahili, Nyerere famously encouraged leaders in the South to work together and pursue more autonomous policies vis-à-vis the global economy. Born into a local leader's family on the Eastern shores of Lake Victoria, Nyerere trained to be a teacher at Makerere University, Kampala, and subsequently studied history and political economy at the University of Edinburgh. He developed a vision for a uniquely African socialism, and deployed it in his teaching and political activism when he returned to colonial Tanganyika. Mwalimu was named Prime Minister after the British granted internal self-government in 1961. Following a reputedly "bloodless" independence, Nyerere negotiated a union with the new African leaders of Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanzania in 1964.

President Nyerere detailed his strategy for Tanzania's autonomous and socialist development in the Arusha Declaration of 1967. Faced with a massive foreign debt load, declining aid flows, and lower world prices for the agricultural exports Tanzania relied upon to secure foreign exchange, Nyerere called for increased literacy, the nationalization of industry, and the collectivization of agriculture. Nyerere disliked how colonialism had altered Tanzania's culture, and believed that a return to ujamaa (traditional village life) and family ties would lead to a better future. His agricultural policy uprooted millions from their homes and placed them in planned villages. However, this policy failed to make Tanzania self-reliant in food and was eventually abandoned. Mwalimu's large-scale literacy campaigns were more effective, though many liberal observers now consider his rejection of foreign investment to have been misguided. Despite his vocal disdain for the International Monetary Fund's conditionality, Tanzania's financial arrears forced him to enter into arrangements with the Fund in the early 1980s.

One of the founders of the Organization for African Unity, Nyerere consistently criticized white supremacist regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa, and also played a major role in the overthrow of Idi Amin's oppressive dictatorship by sending military forces to Uganda in 1979. Unlike other African leaders of his era, Mwalimu's voice commanded respect in the international community, as he had not accumulated a large personal fortune through abuse of power. His reputation grew after he chose not to seek election for a fourth time in 1985. Two years later he served as the Chair of the South Commission on the international development experience and Third World intergovernmental cooperation,

and went on to become the Honorary Chair of the South Centre. Mwalimu built a politically stable country, but his autonomous policies did not rectify Tanzania's financial impoverishment.

Suggested
Reading:

Helleiner, Gerry. 2000. The legacies of Julius Nyerere: An economist's reflections. Paper presented at the Queen's University Studies in National and International Development (SNID) Seminar Series. (accessed 14 July 2005)

Legum, C. and G. Mmari. eds. 1995. *Mwalimu: The influence of Nyerere*. London: Africa World Press.

Nyerere, Julius. 1968. *Freedom and socialism. A selection from writings and speeches, 1965-1967*. Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press.