

Keynote Speaker Interview: Tusu Tusubira



Tusu Tusubira, founder of the UbuntuNet Alliance, received the Network Information and Infrastructure Service Award and served on the boards of RENU and TENET, in Uganda and South Africa. He worked for Makerere University for 32 years and continues to actively participate in research. CONNECT caught up with Dr. Tusubira before he travelled to join TNC19 as a keynote speaker (Wednesday Closing Plenary 16:00-17:30).

The theme of TNC19 is 'Forging Digital Societies'. What does it mean to you?

I always think of a society in the sense of a community, a group bound together by common values and common aspirations, and that they will do everything decent to promote and defend. Forging digital societies therefore means creating communities that are adapted to life in a digital environment, all bound together by common values and aspirations. The forging must therefore start with a clear statement of values and aspirations. The research and education networks of the new dawn could be like this, especially when scientific and technological capability have developed to the level where they challenge traditional ethical values. In so far as ethics are driven by societal values, is this the time to rethink who we are?

You have often discussed the challenges of R&E networks on the African continent. How can African NRENs deal with such challenges? What can the GÉANT community do to help?

I would like to believe that I never talk about challenges without recognising the many opportunities first – and we have many of both. Then again, we can either philosophically or through science recognise the opportunities in

any challenge. Gravity, for example, may be seen as a hinderance to space travel, and yet without gravity, we would not be using sling-shot physics to aid deep space exploration. How can the GÉANT community help? Understand: a baby learning how to walk has opportunities and challenges. The adult must learn when to encourage, when to move a table out of the way, and when to leave the table there as possible transitional support – or maybe as a lesson. Come to us, listen to us, understand us, listen to our solutions and share your own experience. Recognise the obstacles to remove – and know when apparent obstacles can be an aide.

In your view, what lies ahead for the UbuntuNet Alliance after the appointment of the new CEO, Dr Matthews Mtumbuka?

Exciting times, reconsolidation, and growth! To achieve this, it is important to remember that the caterpillar, the chrysalis, and the butterfly may look different, but they have the same genetic code defining its various forms. Matthews is young, the new generation, and I believe he recognises that it may be time for the chrysalis to change to a butterfly. So long as the genetic code – the values that define the Alliance – hold true, the Alliance will go to greater heights.

In 2015 you received the African Network Information and Infrastructure Award. What did it mean to you and to the community?

I believe it was a statement that the African community is doing a lot. I believe that any award is never really a personal achievement because whatever one does builds onto what others have done before. The toddler who sits on her father's shoulder is excited and happy about their reach, but never has any illusion about who has enabled it: they clutch tightly on to the head. A recognition is therefore always a challenge to do more so that those who follow can reach even higher.

We are really pleased that you will deliver a keynote address at TNC. What do you expect from TNC19?

I am excited, delighted, and challenged! First and foremost, I look to renewing friendships and making new friends. A meeting with people for the first time is a voyage of exploration, a smorgasbord of cultural and individual experience waiting to be enjoyed. I am a dedicated life-long learner: there will be new ideas, new perspectives, new ways of thinking. There will be the excitement of listening to young people, creative and innovative minds designing the future – indeed forging the digital societies. I also look forward to experiencing Estonia, a country that is a step in the future ahead of most in terms of exploiting technology in government and governance.

Tell us a bit about yourself: hobbies, travels and plans for the future.

I love music and dancing – any genre: from the classics to the excitement and energy of African drums; from the haunting melodies of the Pacific to the melting pot music of the Caribbean. I led choirs. I was in a band. I love reading and writing. I am a life-long teacher supporting people to develop their values, thinking, and themselves. I am a Rotarian and love working with communities. I have had the opportunity to travel my exciting continent Africa and the world, to appreciate both the wide variations in environments and people – and especially the great similarity among peoples of the world. I love travelling most when I am with my friend and spouse Dorcas. Future plans? I hope to give an increasing amount of time working with communities, both as a Rotarian and in my personal capacity.