

Daniel Kobei's lunchtime keynote focused on the challenges faced by Indigenous communities, particularly in Kenya, and the importance of Indigenous-led research. As a member of the Ogiek community, he shared personal and historical insights into land issues, health, and cultural preservation. He highlighted how Indigenous perspectives are often overlooked in academic research and emphasized the need for partnerships that respect and incorporate Indigenous knowledge.

Kobei discussed the historical and ongoing struggles of Indigenous communities in Kenya, particularly with land rights. He noted that for Indigenous people, land is not merely property but a vital cultural and spiritual connection. However, Indigenous communities continue to face displacement due to government policies, land confiscation, conservation efforts, and commercial exploitation. He shared examples of forced evictions that have led to severe mental health challenges within his community, emphasizing how land dispossession disrupts traditional healing practices and cultural continuity.

He introduced the concept of solace and nostalgia, the distress caused by environmental change and displacement, which affects Indigenous people's mental and emotional well-being. Research conducted with international partners has demonstrated that dislocation leads to increased mental health struggles, yet conventional healthcare systems often fail to recognize these unique challenges. Kobei stressed the importance of integrating Indigenous healing methods with modern medical approaches and ensuring that research conducted on Indigenous communities benefits those communities directly.

A significant part of his speech focused on the role of young generations in preserving Indigenous knowledge. He noted that as elders pass away, valuable traditional wisdom risks being lost. His organization has been working on conservation and documentation efforts, ensuring that younger members of the community learn about traditional medicine, sacred sites, and land stewardship. He invited scholars to collaborate with Indigenous groups to support and document these efforts, advocating for more research led by Indigenous people themselves.

Kobei also addressed the disparity in global academic research, pointing out that while many international scholars study Indigenous communities, there is a lack of research conducted by Africans on their own Indigenous populations. He emphasized the need for free, prior, and informed consent in research, ensuring that Indigenous communities have a say in studies that impact them. He expressed openness to partnerships and knowledge exchange, particularly with Indigenous groups in Canada, to foster mutual learning and advocacy.

In conclusion, Kobei called for greater collaboration between academia and Indigenous communities, stressing the value of Indigenous knowledge in addressing contemporary global challenges, including climate change and health inequities. He urged scholars to move beyond extraction-based research models and engage in reciprocal, respectful partnerships that empower Indigenous communities and honor their knowledge systems.